MIGRANT MINISTRY
REPORT IN EUROPE

GOD WALKS
WITH HIS PEOPLE

BEST PRACTICES 2024

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This volume illustrates the results of the Yearly Report on the Pastoral Care of Migrants in Europe, realised by the Catholic University of Milan – WWELL Research Centre[1] on behalf of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development.

Following the previous editions of the study[2], the present Pastoral Report offers a collection of 25 Good Practices, selected among a wide range of initiatives developed by several Catholic organisations based in Europe.

In this edition, attention was particularly focused on spiritual assistance initiatives dedicated to migrants, refugees and displaced persons, privileging those aimed at the most vulnerable people. It emerges how, thanks to the sensitivity and creativity of the many faces of the Catholic Church, spiritual and pastoral support becomes a lever for the empowerment of migrants, especially when they find themselves facing particularly challenging situations.

Disclosing the commitment of the Catholic world, throughout Europe, it is demonstrated how precious it is both in supporting the integration of migrants and in promoting a harmonious development of social coexistence.

May 2025

1 The interviews and the analysis were performed by Isabel Recavarren, PhD, supervised by the Scientific Director of the research, Prof. Laura Zanfrini, and by Prof. Giovanni Giulio Valtolina.

2 Report on the Pastoral Care of Migrants in 2017; Migrant Ministry in Europe Report 2019; Migrants Ministry Report in Europe during the pandemic crisis 2020-2021; Migrant Ministry Report: Building the future with migrants and refugees: Best Practices 2023; Migrant Ministry Report in Europe: Free to Choose Whether to Migrate or Stay, are all available at: https://migrants-refugees.va/resource-center/documents/

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AIM OF THE REPORT

The aim of the Report is to provide the results of the Yearly research on the Pastoral Care of Migrants in Europe, realised by the Catholic University of Milan – WWELL Research Centre, on behalf of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. The Report presents a set of twenty-five Good Practices selected among a heterogeneous number of initiatives implemented, developed or supported by European Catholic organisations.

METHODOLOGY

The identification of the twenty-five Good Practices began with a formal outreach effort coordinated by the WWELL Center at the Catholic University of Milan, which involved sending institutional letters to selected contacts. However, this approach yielded limited results, likely due to the daily rhythm and priorities of religious life and, once the Report focus on *Spiritual Accompaniment* became clear, to the sensitive nature of the subject itself. In contrast, direct contact with Catholic organizations and ecclesial entities proved much more effective.

Personal communication - through phone calls, written messages, and individual conversations - proved to be the most reliable way to establish trust and encourage participation. In this context, tools such as WhatsApp were particularly helpful for maintaining follow-up, especially in international settings or with itinerant pastoral workers.

The selection of Good Practices was based on the coherence between their goals and actions, their originality, spiritual depth, and their capacity to foster processes of transformation at both personal and community levels. In total, forty experiences were identified. Some were excluded because they did not correspond to the time frame established for the Report; others because they did not clearly define specific actions of spiritual accompaniment; and some decided not to participate despite having initially shared relevant information.

At the end, twenty-five Good Practices are presented. Most were identified through direct contact with those responsible for the initiatives. Once a date and time were agreed upon, an individual interview was conducted—usually online—which allowed for a free and in-depth conversation. In the first part, the interviewee explained the mission of their Congregation/Organization, the origin of the project, and how it connects with the charism of the community or with the needs of migrants and asylum seekers. The most sensitive section focused on *Spiritual Accompaniment*, which required the interviewee to share their faith, revisit lived reflect on the fruits of this journey.

The second part of the interview focused on the seven parameters proposed by the Dicastery to evaluate Good Practices. Each interview lasted between fifty minutes and an hour and a half. Once concluded, the interviews were transcribed and turned into structured narratives.

The focus of this yearly Report is Spiritual Accompaniment. In religious life, this act represents the most intimate gift a consecrated person can offer to another human being: a surrender that comes from the soul, a silent commitment to walk alongside people amid their journeys. It is a delicate experience, both for what it means to the one who offers it and for the transformative effect it can have on the one who receives it. It often entails reconstruction, hope, and the recovery of dignity. It follows no fixed protocol; it is a deep emotional connection, lived with hope, joy, and the desire to do good. For many religious women and men, it embodies the deepest form of fulfilment in their vocation consecrated to God.

Not everyone in daily life feels ready or open to receiving spiritual accompaniment; some do not even consider it necessary. However, those who truly need it—and in a deeper sense, we all should—seek an inner guide to help restore dignity and direction in life. Often, they simply long to be heard.

Vulnerable people arriving in unfamiliar country—where they are often not welcome—face a wall of rejection. They do not know whom to trust. A welcome at the docks, a word of comfort in the chaplaincies of detention centres, a friendly presence in the streets for those forced into prostitution, or a hot meal for those sleeping outdoors—these are all forms of spiritual accompaniment that arise in moments of profound solitude.

But how can this kind of presence be evaluated within a methodological framework?

This Report has been a journey of discovery. Each Good Practice has opened a new space of insight. It has revealed the vulnerabilities of those who migrate and the remarkable capacity of Catholic Congregations/Organisations to respond with humanity, sensitivity, and creativity to urgent and evolving needs. Through listening, observation, confession, prayer, or even through a simple gesture that anticipates another's pain, a deeply spiritual communication is born. This is not primarily about material assistance—though that may accompany it—but about a humanity that embraces and consoles another. What it is offered is a balm. Many migrants and asylum seekers have lived this experience and expressed profound gratitude for having been welcomed, restored in their dignity, and given hope.

Within this framework, the seven parameters of the Report — **Positive Impact, Sustainability, Innovation, Effectiveness, Participatory Approach, Collaborative Approach, and Replicability** — help those involved, after expressing their emotions, to review their work from a more structured lens. It is an intimate process, often marked by moments of great tenderness and even tears, when recalling situations in which helplessness prevented them from doing or saying what was needed — decisions beyond their control. To evaluate such experiences is not to reduce them to technical metrics, but to recognise, with reverence, the transformative power of the spirit amid human suffering.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT – A THEOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL PERSPECTIVE

This assessment offers a transversal reflection rooted in the theological, anthropological, and ethical foundations that support the good practices described in this report. It complements the methodological and descriptive sections by highlighting the deeper spiritual and human motivations behind the actions of the different kind of Catholic organisation across Europe.

This Report is dedicated to the Spiritual Accompaniment of migrants, refugees, displaced people and human trafficking victims. These individuals come to the European continent from all over the world—many of them escaping war, injustice, or persecution—in search of work, but above all, in search of freedom and protection.

Freedom is as essential as air—for the development of ideas, for progress, for living life to the fullest. Those who arrive in Europe, having overcome countless difficulties, begin a journey toward achieving their freedom—one that will require constant effort to perfect and consolidate. Europe is perceived from the outside as a land of freedom, a place where ideas are realized—made possible by that very freedom.

Great, then, is the disappointment for those who, in their naivety, imagine they will be received on European soil *"almost as heroes"* for the dangerous journey they have endured. Their motivation is high, but so is the barrier they face. Each person must earn their freedom and development. Having arrived, they have reached the goal they most desired.

Catholic religious congregations that have dedicated their mission and charism to these people do so out of faith and confidence in the ontological dignity of every human being arriving in Europe—whether migrant or asylum seeker. Even when they do not share a common language, race, or religion, these congregations recognize every person as created in the image and likeness of God and redeemed in Christ Jesus. On this foundation rests their commitment to the weakest and most vulnerable, upholding the primacy of the human person and defending their dignity under all circumstances.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recently marked its 75th anniversary. While its principles are well established, they require ongoing vigilance; each generation must safeguard against regression. Despite such vigilance, human rights are continuously violated. The vocation of these congregations is thus invaluable—they act. Their presence halts decline and restores dignity: to the migrant, to the asylum seeker.

Their mission extends beyond national boundaries. Many congregations have created international legal entities, some with a global reach, dedicated entirely to caring for migrants and asylum seekers.

This is also true of women's congregations. They are present at points of arrival, assisting the most vulnerable—especially women who have been victims of trafficking. These are problems that often only women can truly address. Two networks—**Talitha Kum** and **RENATE**—have emerged as transnational responses rooted in feminine religious charisms.

Each vulnerable person is spiritually accompanied to rediscover their essence within God's plan of creation. In the process of rescue, it is not only two people in conversation—God Himself is the one moving transformation in women who have been sold, deceived, or convinced they are worthless beyond exploitation. True spiritual accompaniment requires a deep, trusting connection. This trust can only arise from a conviction in the uniqueness, value, and inalienable dignity of every person.

Migrants and asylum seekers who are part of the Catholic Church seek to build their identity through participation in ecclesial life. If their social condition is, for many, considered "unworthy" due to poverty or exclusion, this in no way touches their human essence. Their dignity is untouchable. It is inherent.

For Catholics, through baptism we are called to the holiness of Christ. The life we have received is an opportunity to fulfil that calling. Spiritual accompaniment helps us grow—and in many cases, even to change the course of our lives. Through this accompaniment, we arrive at discernment: we come to understand what God asks of us, exercise our free will, and orient our lives accordingly.

Facing this burden of suffering, injustice, and abuse of freedom—or even lack of it—spiritual accompaniment can be transformative, but only if the person being accompanied has had an experience of God. This person seeks God in their life, desires to live according to His will, to find Him in all things, to love and serve Him, and to make Him the foundation and meaning of their life. The one who seeks spiritual accompaniment is a seeker of God—because they know, deep down, that they are also being sought by God. As it is said, God is the eternal seeker of humankind.

It is with this belief that this collection of good practices implemented by Catholic organisations across Europe, working in the best interests of migrants and asylum seekers, has been developed.

Recalling the words of Pope Francis: "*This accompaniment can be fruitful if both parties have experienced sonship and spiritual brotherhood. We discover that we are children of God when we discover that we are brothers and sisters, children of the same Father. This is why it is essential to be part of a community on the journey. We are not alone; we are people of a people, of a nation, of a city on the journey, of a Church, of a parish, of this group… a community on the journey. We do not go to the Lord alone: this is not right. We must understand this. As in the Gospel story of the paralytic, we are often sustained and healed thanks to the faith of another person (cf. Mk 2:1–5); this person helps us move forward, because we all sometimes experience inner paralysis and need someone to help us overcome this conflict with their help. We do not go to the Lord alone, let us remember this; other times, we are the ones who make this commitment for another brother or sister. And we are companions to help others. Without an experience of sonship and brotherhood, accompaniment can lead to unrealistic expectations, misunderstandings, and forms of dependency that leave the person in a childlike state. Accompaniment, but as children of God and brothers and sisters with us.*

The Virgin Mary is a teacher of discernment: she speaks little, listens much, and keeps it in her heart (cf. Lk 2:19). The three attitudes of the Virgin: speak little, listen much, and keep it in her heart" [General Audience, January 4, 2023 – Catechesis on Discernment 14. Spiritual Accompaniment].

DEVELOPED ACTION

From more than thirty experiences of generous service to others, we have selected twenty-five Good Practices, grouped into the following themes:

I. **Community Welcome and Shared Life**

II. **Spaces of Dignity, Listening, and Restoration**

III. **Spiritual Accompaniment and Pastoral Commitment**

IV. **Combating Human Trafficking and Promoting Women's Dignity**

V. **Public Witness and Embodied Spirituality**

VI. **Youth, Migration, and Meaning**

In *Community Welcome and Shared Life*, six Good Practices show the natural generosity of those who seek to do good, acting from their Catholic sensibility without calculation. They welcome hoping that something will change: they can have migratory status and their faith could grow. They welcome to restore a sense of home in the Church of God. They welcome to allow each person to grow in their identity, seen as a richness; to strengthen faith acquired elsewhere; to restore the dignity of being a woman.

In *Spaces of Dignity, Listening, and Restoration*, five experiences confirm faith in God and in creation: humanity. These are homes that offer warmth to those who arrive with nothing, places where a word or a gesture is enough to feel accepted. Sometimes a hot meal, a listening ear, or a silent presence is all it takes. Some are located near ports, where people arrive after uncertain journeys. Someone waits for them—to offer a word, a roof, a human touch. To feel accepted. To feel useful. To begin to heal.

In *Spiritual Accompaniment and Pastoral Commitment*, four practices speak of hope: from Salesian pedagogy to networks that would not exist without this pastoral impulse. Spirituality multiplies in those who transmit it. Accompaniment reaches places like prisons, where

spiritual growth does not stop. There, many rediscover themselves and the Holy Spirit. Conversion is possible, even where external freedom is absent.

In *Combating Human Trafficking and Promoting Women's Dignity*, we enter a world of deep suffering—but also of hope. Five Good Practices accompany women betrayed by their families, degraded by circumstance, and who have lost faith in themselves. But they meet other women who help them recover strength, dignity, and value. The hope and confidence these sisters inspire is grounded in the words of Jesus: **"Talitha kum"** which in Aramaic means "Little girl, I say to you, arise." Jesus said this to the daughter of Jairus, a twelve-year-old girl who was dead. She stood up and walked. Christ's power to heal and restore life is the same faith that restores others.

In *Public Witness and Embodied Spirituality*, four Good Practices show the strength of faith in moments of crisis. When everything fails, faith provides. When there are no solutions, faith opens new paths. Even in wartime, as in Ukraine, **spiritual accompaniment** creates new structures of consolation, presence, and listening. Community is built even without words. Sometimes, years later, a phone call comes from another country just to say thank you. Witness bears fruit: welcome, participation, community building, walking together. For the vitality of migration also strengthens synodality—**the art of walking together.**

Lastly, *Youth, Migration, and Meaning* presents a single Good Practice, overflowing with hope. In it, more than being believed, **there is certainty** that a written message can reach the heart, inspire reflection, and change someone's path. A voice saying: "We are here. Have faith. You will make it."

We end this journey among generous people who restore hope in humanity, with the words of a group of them, operating in Czech Republic: *"Lord Jesus, here I am. I come to You just as I am. I believe. You look at me with great love. Recreate me. Touch and heal everything that is wounded and broken within me. You know everything, Lord."*

SELECTED BEST PRACTICES

I. COMMUNITY WELCOME AND SHARED LIFE

SHARED HOME: RELIGIOUS LIFE AND RADICAL HOSPITALITY, DAUGHTERS OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS, FRANCE

Country and Place: France, Lyon

Initiative: Hospitality Pilot Project

Beneficiaries: Asylum seekers

Theme: Community Welcome and Shared Life

Project Duration: Since 2024 to date

Funding Source: Congregation and sharing of expenses Project / Community: https://www.don-bosco.net/membres-de-la-famille-salesienne/filles-de-maria-auxiliatrice/JPIC
Commission: https://www.uisg.org/en/commissions/jpic/
UISG: https://www.uisg.org/en
USG: https://www.usgroma.org/en/

Catholic Organization: Daughters of Mary Help of Christians

The Commission for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC), promoted by the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (FMA), was established in 1982 through a joint initiative of the International Union of Superiors General and the Union of Superiors General. It aims to integrate contemplation and action, transforming the world in the spirit of the Gospel through lives that bear witness to justice, peace, and care for creation. The Commission is guided by four core principles: Justice, Peace, Integrity of Creation, and Solidarity with Migrants and Refugees[1]. "*Pope Francis call to Lampedusa (2013) generated a favourable movement among Catholic parishes. We are very sensitive about it, because it is about fraternity. Associations were created, including an*

1 The following passages in quotation marks and italics are statements from the interviewee.

Association coordinated by the Salesian Congregation, which was very remarkable; it brought us into contact with many different realities: we offer shelter, housing, and friendship", says Sr. C.G., a sister of the community of the Congregation.

There are two visions within the Congregation: on the one hand, the need to come together "*to form a larger community and be able to live our religious life of prayer"*. Another group, however, believes that "*the suffering of our brothers and sisters calls us, and then we must invent a new way of building community",* practicing community life with some migrant women.

Religious life is dynamic and very active. The house, significantly called "A Shared Home", is in Lyon, where three sisters with a specific professional profile, are currently serving. After understanding the reality of Lyon and contacting various associations, they decided to welcome those requesting refugee status for the duration of the house rental. They contacted the Association that coordinates all migrant-related associations at the Church level. They welcomed four asylum seekers: one Muslim, one interested in shamanism, one Christian but not Catholic, and one who identifies herself as "*half Muslim, half Christian*". They are three mature women with stories marked by pain, and an 18-year-old young woman.

The sisters have already worked in Morocco with migrants in transit to Europe. *"We are aware that we receive people very poorly in Europe, and this causes great disappointment".* They helped those who dreamed of an ideal welcome, explaining that upon arriving in Europe, they probably wouldn't be received as they expected. *"Once, a man told me: 'I crossed Libya, I was in prison, I suffered for three years... I thought they would roll out a red carpet for me when I arrived'. That phrase left a lasting impression on me".* Therefore, in Lyon, the 3 professional sisters decided to focus on the most essential: offering a home and true friendship, beyond the care dimension. The community lives with a logic of reciprocity, sharing household chores, traditional meals, and celebrations such as Easter, Ramadan, and Eid.

It's a modest house; they expect to renew the lease next year. Nevertheless, *"the Congregation is very interested in the continuation of this Pilot Project".* They have lived up to the Christian spirit of welcome and, above all, with an accompaniment that is born of coexistence and

shared friendship. The dimension of reciprocity, of participation, and of trying to create a family, a community, is very important for them. The spiritual dimension is present in the small gestures of everyday life: in the turns to bless the table in different languages and faiths, in the shared celebrations of Ramadan, Easter, and Eid, and especially in moments when they pray together, like when one of the guests asked to pray with a sister because she felt her God was no longer listening to her. In that shared silence, without words, it was born one of the most intense expressions of mutual spiritual accompaniment among women of different cultures, religions, and life paths.

EVALUATION OF THE GOOD PRACTICE ACCORDING TO THE MAIN PARAMETERS

POSITIVE IMPACT

"They arrived very tired, introverted, deeply impressed by the experience; then, as we lived together, we saw them like flowers opening up". Little by little, the migrant women have regained confidence, the desire to laugh, and the strength to resume their personal projects. The community has also been enriched by this experience, discovering new ways of fraternity and living the Christian faith.

SUSTAINABILITY

The house is rented by the Congregation. The sisters are responsible for its maintenance, and, if any of the guests wish to contribute, a symbolic amount has been established. Although not all of the religious community shares the vision of mixed community life, sustainability will depend on the number of sisters available and the institutional willingness to support this new way of religious life.

INNOVATION

The community does not act "*for*" the migrants, but "*with*" them. The innovation lies in sharing daily life as equals, without hierarchies. *"It's not about welcoming migrants: it's about living with my sister; Do I have a spare room? So how can I leave her on the street?"*, they explain. This vision radically transforms the pastoral approach in a concrete everyday fraternity.

EFFECTIVENESS

Although there are no quantifiable indicators, the impact is evident: from the recovery of spirit to active participation in community life. The women have begun to express their talents, propose activities, and regain their dignity. The community has contributed to restoring bonds broken by violence, loneliness and remoteness.

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

Everyday life is organized by everyone. All practical decisions, such as who cooks or what to grow in the small garden, are shared. The sisters offer spiritual guidance, avoiding any form of imposition.

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

From the beginning, the project was built on a network with specialized associations that deal with legal and social aspects. The community maintains close ties with the Catholic Association that coordinates the migrant reception initiatives in Lyon.

REPLICABILITY

Although discreet, this practice has already inspired other religious communities. *"Many congregations do the same thing without saying so"*, explains the Pilot Project leader. This model can be replicated as long as there is willingness, openness, and available place.

A PEOPLE ON THE MOVE: FAITH, COEXISTENCE, AND WELCOME, SCALABRINIAN SECULAR MISSIONARIES, SWITZERLAND

Country and Place: Switzerland, Solothurn

Initiative: A People on the Move: Faith, Coexistence, and Welcome

Beneficiaries: Migrants, refugees, women in vulnerable situations, first- and second-generation youth, young Swiss

Thematic: Spiritual accompaniment, social integration, pastoral education, intercultural dialogue

Duration of Project: Since 1961 to date

Source of Funds: Professional work of the missionaries, sharing of community goods

Website: https://www.scala-mss.net/

Catholic Organization: Scalabrinian Secular Missionaries (Secular Institute of the Scalabrinian Family)

The Italian Catholic mission of the Scalabrinian Missionaries was established in Solothurn, Switzerland, at a time of great migratory influx from the Mediterranean countries to Northern Europe and also to Switzerland. They were looking for a teacher for the children of Italian immigrants, and they sent letters to Italy. *"Adelia Firetti responded to one of these letters. She was the beginner of our community. She stayed here, said yes to God, and gave her life to God",* says C.L., Scalabrinian Secular Missionary[2].

At that time, the 1960s, there were opportunities to help those who emigrated "*that she didn't even know about. Other young women joined her, forming the first nucleus of the Community, which was approved as a Secular Institute in 1990*".

The Scalabrinian Secular Missionaries are part of the Scalabrinian family, founded by Saint Scalabrini. They live in a secular consecration "*with the evangelical vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience*". Their approach is formative; they seek to care for and promote, at various levels, the

2 All passages in quotation marks and italics correspond to the interviewee.

relationships with migrants and refugees, "*from a Christian vision of the person*". Their spirituality is also evident here. "*We recognize each person as a daughter or son of God, created in his image*". There are approximately 45 women, and they live *"in small communities, let's say small cells*". The vocation to spiritually accompany the migrants was born from placing themselves at God's disposal in the context of migration. Nurturing everyone's spirituality "*certainly gives meaning to migration and also makes us discover a beyond this project of God in which all humanity journeys together*". They consider it a contribution to creating relationships of peace and reconciliation in highly divided societies, even in large cities. They hold get-togethers with young people of various nationalities, including the children of migrants and refugees. In these meetings, young Swiss people participate in weekly conversation groups.

They also organise training processes for pastoral workers. Their goal is "*to connect, to empower the person, the teacher, the priest, the young person, the student, who is rooted and can open up*". They wish to create a culture of encounter: "*we feel this a lot in our encounters with asylum seekers, those who, for example, have been denied permission, who have very difficult paths to social integration*".

The Scalabrinian Missionaries believe it is very important "*to meet someone who looks you in the eye on an equal footing and makes you feel that you are not a number, that you are not a case, like in the letters they receive from the various immigration offices: there is always you, you are the case and the number, but I am also a person; this is important*".

EVALUATION OF THE GOOD PRACTICE ACCORDING TO THE MAIN PARAMETERS

POSITIVE IMPACT

They offer prayer and training meetings, fostering social and spiritual integration. They organize conversation groups in German with volunteers and intercultural meetings on education, gender, and migration. They provide safe spaces for refugee women from Afghanistan, Iraq, Eritrea, and Ukraine. *"A document on intercultural pastoral care has just been published throughout Switzerland, where we have closely collaborated in the education of young priests responsible for the future of the Church. This has an impact on both the Church and society".*

SUSTAINABILITY

"We live in a communion of goods, and our work supports the various activities and initiatives we carry out. We share what we earn and, from there, live in community. We also propose this lifestyle to those who participate in our meetings, whether for a day, a weekend, or a week". The project is not only sustained by the activities that emerge, *"but also by our spirituality and the charism that sustains us over time and helps us not to give up".* New initiatives often emerge - training, German language school, spiritual guidance - but some come to an end, and others are reborn: *"it's part of the journey".*

INNOVATION

They integrate faith with cultural and linguistic training. They have developed an approach to accompaniment where the migrant is seen as a person and not as a social case. *"The novelty of once again placing the welcome of others at the center, which also makes you rediscover yourself—because no one can live as an island, as a solitary person".* They implement coexistence dynamics in the light of the Gospel.

EFFECTIVENESS

They succeed in generating fraternal bonds between migrants and the host community. Their approach enables Swiss families to welcome refugees as if they were part of their family. They have inspired second-generation young people to value their families' migration history. "*Seeing the diversity of others - cultural and linguistic - is sometimes the least important. The diversity of others is a possibility, a treasure*".

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

"Our best collaborators are first-, second-, and third-generation youth—refugees themselves—such as those who speak German and become part of the group's leadership pool, or who participate in meetings by sharing their life experiences or their faith, even if it is a different religion". They promote gatherings in the homes of both migrants and locals to create genuine bonds.

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

They work with parishes and community councils to raise awareness on welcoming migrants. They collaborate with training initiatives and integration centers. They create places for interreligious and intercultural dialogue, without losing their Catholic identity.

REPLICABILITY

Their model can be adopted by parish communities and lay groups. *"We are a community. I think this helps a lot over time - not just for a period - but later, we see it as a mission, as a spirituality as well."*

THE HOUSE OF MERCY, DIOCESE OF CHORTKIV, UKRAINE

Country and Place: Ukraine, Chortkiv, Region Ternopil.

Initiative: Comprehensive care and spiritual accompaniment for children with disabilities, orphans, displaced and vulnerable people

Beneficiaries: Children with autism and disabilities, women victims of violence, displaced people, orphans, homeless people, and abandoned elderly

Themes: Inclusion, spiritual accompaniment, healing, comprehensive care, human and Christian education

Project duration: Since 2009 to date

Source of funds: Private donations, volunteers, support from the local diocese, and international solidarity networks, such as Don Carlo Gnocchi Foundation and International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC)

Website: https://www.houseofmercy.org.ua/

Catholic Organization: Diocesan project with lay coordination and ongoing spiritual assistance

The House of Mercy (*Dim myloserdiia*) was established in 2009 by Bishop D., Father I., and T.D., in Chortkiv, Ternopil Region, within the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. It was created to provide shelter, assistance, and spiritual support for children with disabilities. The project began in 2010, when T.D., after emigrating to Italy with her husband and son, was forced to return to Ukraine due to health problems and the loss of her husband's job. Upon her return, she faced new challenges: her son was diagnosed with autism, and there was no adequate medical care available in her village. She was forced to travel frequently to another city. *"I soon discovered that many other children were in the same situation, so I decided to gather them in my home to offer support. My neighbours reacted with hostility, complaining about the presence of disabled children near their homes and even filing a lawsuit against me"***,** says T.D., who currently leads the "Dim mylosrdia" Foundation, with Bishop D. and Father I.T.[3] The lawsuit unleashed a wave of support, culminating in the donation of land for the construction of a suitable center. The initial goal was to build a single-floor space, but with time and donations, the project expanded to a five-story building, thanks

3 All passages in quotation marks and italics belong to the interviewee.

to the unwavering faith and collective efforts of its founders and supporters. *"We built the chapel first, only after that we begin to do other things. We celebrate Mass every day. We do morning prayer, Eucharistic adoration, and the rosary"*. A shared life is offered that transforms both the person who serves and the person served. *"I believe that a person can help spiritually when they live spiritually. Because whoever washes, whoever cooks, whoever cleans, must also accompany spiritually"*.

When the war began in Ukraine, the House of Mercy expanded its mission to welcome displaced people from Russian-occupied territories. Many women and children spent months living in basements to escape the bombing. In this way, hospitality and solidarity became a daily norm at the center. In a country devastated by war, the House of Mercy has become a haven of hope, where daily funeral processions serve as a reminder of the lost persons and the grief caused by the conflict. *"Faith is lived here. A person may not ask what they believe for. But they forgive. And they pray. We welcome everyone. We don't ask what they believe for. But prayer sustains everything"*.

The chapel, which has become the spiritual and symbolic heart of the project, continues to offer a space for prayer, comfort, and healing, both physical and spiritual. *"We had religious vocations born here. Also, from children who didn't speak and now sing the entire Mass"*. Inspiring similar works both at national and international levels, the initiative collaborates closely with the Diocese, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, humanitarian organizations, and international volunteers, which has significantly expanded the project's reach and effectiveness. *"We receive support from the Ternopil Region; the Foundation is an example in Ukraine; we have been visited by people from Kyiv. This property belongs to the Church and will always be"*.

EVALUATION OF THE GOOD PRACTICE ACCORDING TO THE MAIN PARAMETERS

POSITIVE IMPACT

The House provides shelter, medical care, and has become a professional rehabilitation center for people with disabilities, supporting single mothers with children and displaced families. *"The chapel, the heart of the community, brings everyone together for morning Mass,*

where even children who cannot speak sing the hymns. The healing is evident, even in adults with terminal illnesses. The prayer meetings and the recitation of the Rosary extend beyond the House of Mercy".

SUSTAINABILITY

Despite financial support from various organizations, the centre, its residents, and its professionals require ongoing care. The continued support of the international community and of the Diocese sustains the centre even during the war: "*Providence plays a crucial role in maintaining the operation of the House of Mercy. Thanks to the support of organizations such as the Don Carlo Gnocchi Foundation and the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), the centre has expanded and strengthened its capacity to receive more people*".

INNOVATION

The model combines shelter, spiritual guidance, and professional care. Innovation *"is the Chapel that has transformed everything. It is driving the replication of the project."* The facility was built to hospital standards. "*The organizational structure is flexible and adapts to new crises, such as the war in Ukraine, responding quickly to humanitarian emergencies*".

EFFECTIVENESS

The program has facilitated the social inclusion and integration of displaced people, helping them find employment and rebuild their lives. "*When our children see disabled children coming from the war, who have lost their parents, and praying the Rosary, they want to accompany them. It is an example. It is the wealth of the Church*".

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

Hosted families voluntarily contribute to the maintenance of the centre and help organize activities. Volunteer networks have been established to support refugees and facilitate their integration into the community. *"Almost all those who come from war have lost their faith because they have suffered so much. It is important to renew faith in a different way. To recognize that God allows evil and that it has meaning. We explain to them that the House of Mercy was born through suffering*".

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

The initiative collaborates closely with the Diocese, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, humanitarian organizations, and international volunteers, which has significantly expanded the project's reach and effectiveness. "*We receive support from the Ternopoli Region; the Foundation is an example in Ukraine; we have been visited by people from Kyiv. This property belongs to the Church and will always be*".

REPLICABILITY

This model *"has been replicated in other Ukrainian cities, such as Lviv and Horostkiv, which demonstrates its potential for implementation in similar contexts, especially in war-affected areas".* The House is maintained by the entire community, despite having an administrator who is also the founder. It has successfully fostered a spirit of collaboration and respect among all members.

GUERRA 2022 - 2023

THE TAIZÉ COMMUNITY, ECUMENICAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY, FRANCE

Country and Place: France, Taizé

Initiative: Community and spiritual welcome for migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers

Beneficiaries: Yazidi women, Syrian, Iraqi, and Palestinian families, unaccompanied minors moved from Calais, and people rejected by the asylum system

Theme: Comprehensive welcome, spiritual accompaniment, inclusion, community hospitality

Project duration: Since 1940 to date (with greater numbers since 2010)

Funding source: Taizé Community and direct contributions from its brothers

Website: https://www.taize.fr/en

Catholic organization: Ecumenical Christian community with active Catholic presence

The Taizé Community is an ecumenical Christian monastic community founded in 1940 by the Swiss theologian Roger Schutz. Since its beginning, Taizé has been a place of welcome and prayer. *"During the war, Jewish refugees were fleeing foreign territories; Taizé was already actively involved in welcoming and protecting refugees. And it hasn't stopped since",* says O.H., Coordinator of the Reception of Migrants, Asylum Seekers, and Refugees at Taizé[4].

International events have shaped Taizé's vocation. *"Refugees arrived by boat from Laos and Vietnam; during the Rwandan genocide, families came from Rwanda; then, during the Balkan War, we welcomed refugees from Bosnia".* Throughout Europe, 2015 marked a turning point, already foreshadowed in 2010 when the first slightly more structured reception was offered: Eastern Christian families, as well as families from Iraq and Egypt. In France, the *Kouchner system* was in place. The

4 All passages in quotation marks and italics correspond to the interviewee.

Government called for a more institutionalized reception for Eastern Christians, and Taizé was listed as a reception center, both at the prefectural and then at the ministerial level in Paris. Families arrived, Syrian, Muslim, Yazidi: *"Those who survived the 2014 Yazidi genocide and were found in a refugee camp in Iraqi Kurdistan. Nobel Peace Prize laureate Nadia Murad asked various governments to receive these people. President Macron responded positively; we welcomed two women, two mothers with their three and four children, survivors of this genocide".* The Sant'Egidio Community, through its humanitarian corridor, also asked them to welcome two Yazidi women with children and an elderly, ill, and vulnerable father.

Later came the closure of the refugee camp in Calais. *"In northern France, everyone who wanted to cross into the United Kingdom was stuck in Calais; a sort of refugee camp was created with two or three thousand people. The French government asked us to take in its inhabitants, mostly young men, many of them Muslims, including minors. We welcomed forty young people who later remained with us".*

Not being professionals in the field of hospitality, the community formed a team: a group of two or three brothers, a congregation of sisters, and lay people, all of whom faced *"administrative procedures that needed to be managed; people who often arrived with health problems, healthcare support arose. Then, language learning… we organized French classes. We welcomed families with children and took care of all the schooling. These four aspects are repeated in every reception".* Since these were not their areas of expertise, they sought outside support. The nearby village also helped solve logistical challenges such as transportation.

Despite the murder of Brother Roger in 2005, the community has remained faithful to its mission of hospitality, continuing to welcome migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. Taizé's role within the Catholic Church has been reaffirmed by Pope Francis. Addressing the young people gathered at the 47th European Meeting of the Taizé Community, held from December 28, 2024, to January 1, 2025, in Tallinn, Estonia, the Holy Father encouraged participants *"to move forward with hope".* He emphasized that this hope *"overcomes all fatigue, crisis, and anguish",* while providing *"a strong motivation to move forward".* The Pope also highlighted the significance of the Jubilee Year 2025 and Taizé's call to *"hope beyond all hope",* inviting young people to find light and meaning amidst darkness, trusting that God illuminates the path and directs their lives.

EVALUATION OF THE GOOD PRACTICE ACCORDING TO THE MAIN PARAMETERS

POSITIVE IMPACT

All those they hosted received asylum: *"We helped all these people prepare their asylum applications; we accompanied them to the interview in Paris and so on…".* They also welcomed *"those whose applications were rejected and those whose employment status we managed to regularize, for health reasons, etc. And this was possible thanks to our collective work. We didn't do it alone; we achieved it. We used our local resources".* Regarding language acquisition, it allows them *"access to vocational training",* which is very positive. *"Later they can manage on their own; then the young adults know it".* They have found it difficult *"to explain secularism in France, and to understand it, as well as volunteering. The notion of volunteering is also something surprising to understand".*

SUSTAINABILITY

It is the Taizé Community that finances all this reception—homes, utilities, vehicles, and the entire structure. And that, financially, comes from the community and some brothers who actively participate in the work. The time between the preparation, submission, and outcome of an asylum application is long: *"at least eighteen months; we've seen people who took years and years".* Despite the unpredictable circumstances, *"we focus a lot on that time",* they said. *"Some had a career. Afterwards, they'll continue their lives. But during that time, they only have us".* They use this time for training.

INNOVATION

Without being a professional institution, *"we try to operate almost with professionalism and seriousness",* maintaining the *"freedom to turn to people we know who can meet a specific need at any given time".* There is a core team *"truly supported by the community and a network of trust with volunteers who live near us"*. They cultivate patience as *"a form of spirituality, since it is gratuitousness, openness, and understanding—these are values of humanity. We call it spirituality. These values, depending on our convictions, can be called evangelical values or values of humanity; they unite us, no matter who you are".*

EFFECTIVENESS

The main goal is *"to respond positively to the adaptation request that has been made to us. Then, in a very pragmatic way, to obtain legal status for this person and find the best way to integrate them and guide them toward autonomy"*. Sometimes it is difficult to help people move forward: *"they want to stay, and that's not good, because it means we've welcomed them too much, under our care, and we haven't helped them regain the autonomy and freedom that are essential to human beings. We've created a kind of dependency"*.

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

Those welcomed are served: *"the welcome is free and unconditional, and we never wanted them to be indebted to us. That's why we don't ask them for help, or we are very careful"*. Given their vulnerable condition, the brothers prefer to avoid misunderstandings. *"Once they obtained status, and even once they moved away from here, we dared to ask some of them: 'Can you give us a hand? Could you help us with this or that?'"*.

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

They have built a broad and solid network of trusted relationships to support the goals of the Taizé Community. *"We are in the prefecture, in a community of communes, in the village, in the municipal council, in the municipality. We maintain regular contact with the local doctors involved"*. They also collaborate in education, social work, training, and local businesses.

REPLICABILITY

Being Catholic, Christian, they do not select who is welcomed and so the experience is replicable wherever. *"It is not an association, a method, a small group of people, but rather the diversity of those who welcome, of those who manage to unite around a few elements—values we can call human, evangelical, or whatever you wish. And, despite their diversity, share and welcome together. Understanding different mentalities, with great civility"*.

THE RESURGENCE OF CATHOLICISM, DIOCESE OF HELSINKI, FINLAND

Country and Place: Finland, Helsinki

Initiative: Integrated Pastoral and Social Response to Migrants and Asylum Seekers

Beneficiaries: Approximately 30,000 Catholics, including migrants and asylum seekers

Theme: Spiritual accompaniment and social integration

Project Duration: Since 2006 to date

Funding Source: Catholic Diocese of Helsinki and limited public funds

Website: https://katolinen.fi

Catholic Organization: Catholic Diocese of Helsinki

Catholicism arrived in Finland in 1100. Its growth was cut short by the Lutheran Reformation, which remained dominant until 1900. The Freedom of Expression Act states: *no one is forced to practice a religion against their conscience.* All persons enjoy freedom of expression. The Evangelical Lutheran Church is the largest church in Finland, accounting for 65.2% of the population. Its 5.6 million inhabitants live across a sparsely populated territory. Catholics have had an Apostolic Vicariate and a Diocese since 1955. Today, the officially registered Catholics represent just 0.2% of the population.

However, a renewal of the clergy has brought new life to the Catholic faith across such a vast country that priests must travel thousands of kilometres using all transportation to reach their people, even in the islands. They have overcome the challenge of distance because Catholics are scattered throughout the territory. "*We can't expect them to come to the parishes when they're 300, 250, or 100 kilometres away. So, we go to the people. That is the first step of spiritual and pastoral outreach",* says the Bishop *R.O.*[5]. He also adds: *"According to our estimates,*

5 All passages in quotation marks and italics correspond to the interviewee.

we now have about 30.000 Catholics." This number grows annually, by around 600 new members each year. Half of them are infant baptisms. *"This year, there's a kind of baby boom. It's a great blessing from God. And also, adult baptisms—we currently have about 300 adults, which is a lot for us, preparing to join the Church or be baptized*".

Five thousand young women have arrived from the Philippines to work in healthcare and to study elder care: *"the population in Finland is aging, and there is a lack of vocations in the healthcare sector here."* The clergy are reaching out to them to invite them to the Church, since 90% of these immigrants are Catholic. Many immigrants have also arrived from Africa to work in the service sector: "*many of them are Catholic. We have created a chaplaincy for them. We hold Sunday Mass in a Lutheran church, which fits 300 people, and it's full."* From Ukraine, *"we have 6.000 Greek Catholics. We have a Greek Catholic priest who celebrates the Divine Liturgy at the Cathedral every Sunday. Many mothers with children have arrived, while the men remained in Ukraine due to the war".* Also, migrants from Venezuela and Nicaragua come to Finland: *"we have created a chaplaincy for Latinos, who have come in great numbers, often as large families with many children*".

Mixed marriages have also increased: *"these are churches that grow through children and families. Some immigrants marry locals, or other immigrants who came for work, or refugees from countries in crisis. And many local Finns have begun to rediscover or explore the Catholic Church".*

Conversions have also grown: *"we have 300 adults currently receiving digital training to enter the Catholic Church".* More priests are needed: *"we need more churches because there isn't enough room. In our two Helsinki parishes, we celebrate 7 or 8 consecutive Masses on Sundays, and people are still standing outside".*

Contact with the faithful continues after the sacraments. *"After Mass, people line up, not just for confessions, but to take a selfie, to share their sufferings or joys. I often spend an hour, an hour and a half, with those who wish to see me. That affection is both moving and a great responsibility".*

EVALUATION OF THE GOOD PRACTICE ACCORDING TO THE MAIN PARAMETERS

POSITIVE IMPACT

Despite representing only 0.2% of the population, the Catholic community in Finland is growing steadily. The Church respects the native languages, cultures, and customs of its immigrant members. *"We celebrate the Feast of the Lord of Miracles, Our Lady of Guadalupe, Our Lady of Vietnam, the Feast of African Grandparents. We preserve certain customs as the Finnish Catholic community. Along with integrating through language, local culture is also enriched".* They emphasize that the Church has roots and bears fruit. Moreover, the progress of immigrant families is evident: better employment, children who speak Finnish. *"Going to the people"* includes the Byzantine rite, the Malabar rite, the Maronite rite, the Melkite rite, the Ambrosian rite. And also, the two hundred Catholics from Eritrea celebrate their own very ancient Eritrean liturgy.

SUSTAINABILITY

"Economic sustainability is our challenge." The Catholic Church in Finland *"is a poor church."* More churches are needed, as well as Catholic schools, a home for elderly Catholics living alone, a house for spiritual studies, and a training center. *"We lack complementary infrastructure; we only have eight parishes and eight churches. These are projects we hold dear".* They are appealing to various dioceses and foundations for help. *"We're pursuing a third church in Helsinki and also a retreat house, which would become the diocesan education center. Two million euros are needed".*

INNOVATION

The innovation of this practice consisted in synodality-in-action method. There is a three-year pastoral plan "*known as the New Evangelization, composed of twelve small working committees, each one with at least two laypeople and a priest. These committees address youth, families, immigration, Caritas, diaconate, education, vocations, bioethics, ecumenism, universities, culture, and religious education in schools".* This model fosters journeying together – "*synodality in action",* the bishop stated -, as a new way to manage the parish and include the newcomers from other countries.

EFFECTIVENESS

"There are more and more people in the churches", even though room is insufficient. *"It's a holy problem—there are just more and more people*". More people are going to confession, more are receiving the sacraments, more are asking to be married. "*It's an impressive level of pastoral effectiveness*". There are also more children in First Communion catechism, and more baptisms. For the Diocese, this is measurable success. *"And then there is the effectiveness that only God sees, which we cannot measure. I believe God is very pleased*".

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

Immigrants are not passive recipients, but active contributors: they cook, clean, teach, lead choirs, paint walls, and assist in liturgical preparation. There is a new parish registry: "*we're updating the registry. We're confident that there are 30.000 of us. The challenge is to reach all of them. Where are they? Twenty-five percent of those registered attend Mass every Sunday*".

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

The Finnish state allocates five euros per Catholic to the Diocese, and Parliament recently awarded € 30.000 to support Ukrainian refugees. The Catholic Church collaborates closely with Lutheran and Orthodox communities, who generously provide their churches for Catholic services. Public institutions in Finland have limited knowledge of Catholicism. "*If they knew who we are, it would be easier to help—because help is needed*".

REPLICABILITY

This model is replicable wherever there is commitment, pastoral creativity, and openness to the Holy Spirit. "*I believe the spirit that motivates us is replicable, of course, because it is the Spirit of Jesus. Ultimately, it's about bringing Jesus to others—seeing Jesus in the poor, in the needy. That spirit is replicable*". Unfortunately, "*the State does not help us. But the model is about finding where the needy are—how to help them—and having Jesus as the driving force. If we have Jesus, the Lord, as captain of the ship, He already knows where to steer, where to place the oars and the sails*".

PASTORAL CARE FOR MIGRANTS, ARCHDIOCESE OF MILAN – PARISH OF SANTO STEFANO MAGGIORE, ITALY

Country and Place: Italy, Milan

Initiative: Pastoral Care for Migrants in the Diocese of Milan

Beneficiaries: Economic migrants; families in vulnerable situations; women victims of domestic violence; Brotherhood of Our Lady of Miracles

Theme: Spiritual accompaniment; diocesan integration; faith education; response to gender-based violence

Project Duration: Since 2015 to date

Source of Funding: Entirely supported by the Parish of Santo Stefano Maggiore

Website: http://www.migrantimilano.it/

Catholic Organization: Diocese of Milan – Parish of Santo Stefano Maggiore

The richness of Milan lies in its diversity, which is also reflected in the Church. There is great human diversity, and the Diocese works to ensure that cultural diversity becomes a shared richness. The parish of migrants, Santo Stefano Maggiore, was established as a "personal" parish by Cardinal Angelo Scola, on February 2, 2015, and includes the faithful according to nationality. In the Diocese of Milan, this parish serves Filipinos, Latin Americans, Romanian Catholics of the Latin rite, Albanians, Brazilians, and others for whom no specific pastoral structure exists.

The pastoral care of migrants in the Diocese of Milan deals with *"the pastoral accompaniment of migrants, the majority of whom are economic migrants. They are Christians, baptized Catholics who need to continue growing in the faith they have received elsewhere, in another culture, and therefore, it is all about spiritual accompaniment. On the other hand, it is about the composition of the local Church, the Church of the people, among native Italian Catholics and those who come from other countries,"* explains Fr. A.V., the parish priest of Santo Stefano

Maggiore in Milan and head of the Pastoral Care of Migrants Office of the Ambrosian Diocese[6].

With the exception of children's catechism and youth center, the parish of Santo Stefano carries out *"the things that a normal parish does from a liturgical, education, and service perspective, which are the three pillars of the parish's pastoral plan."* Although we speak of normality, for the performance of baptisms, confirmations, and first communions for adults, the Sunday following our interview *"we will have the first Mass for a child from Ecuador who grew up in the parish and is now becoming a priest for the Diocese of Milan."* A vital group of people resides in the church area: *"it is a normal parish, only the origin of the faithful changes".*

The parish has a social project, named '*Camminando*', which serves migrants. The project was born out of the many needs that couldn't be adequately addressed. Although Caritas delivers a bag of food once a month, requests for assistance regarding the difficulties faced by *"newcomers"* are pressing, and the lack of knowledge of Italian language contributed to poor outcomes.

Another turning point was hearing heartbreaking testimonies from immigrant women, victims of gender-based violence. *"I knew this reality in Latin America - I have been there for a few years -, but I had no idea what I discovered here in Milan, through the women telling".* It was impossible not to make a decision: *"we can't deny it, we need to do something"*.

So, in the parish, thanks to a young migrant, who had returned after working for a UN agency, a new approach has been implemented: *"a real support project was created, not a simple referral office: something more humane and relatable".* It was through confession and pastoral closeness that the magnitude of the problem became clear: *"Out of ten confessions, two revealed these sore wounds".* If it was already known that something structural was wrong, what was alarming was the *"impressive number".*

This parish welcomes many communities: *"eight Filipino communities are part of the parish, and other three belong to other parishes. The largest Filipino community alone, the one that meets physically at Santo*

6 The following passages in quotation marks and italics are statements from the interviewee.

Stefano, has approximately two thousand people. The Latin American communities that are part of the parish are four. The one here in Santo Stefano also has one thousand people."

On the other hand, in a changing society, where even families are undergoing transformation, the concept of *"integration"* also needs to be reconsidered: *"how can we ask others to integrate into a society or a Church that no longer has a clear idea of its identity?"* The same holds true when mentioning *"second generation,"* Fr. A.V. warns that *"many young migrants live with a suspended identity, without anchorage either in their country of origin or in the host country. After years, some feel like they are floating in the air. Accompanying them spiritually requires recognizing this complexity, avoiding imposing predefined frameworks".*

Another highly sensitive issue regarding the Peruvian Community concerns the Procession of the Lord of Miracles. *"Although it is a more limited group, it has been possible to strengthen its spiritual character, which is the core of its meaning and identity".* Although it was a parish-based project initiated in 1999, and continued until 2013, by the previous pastor, the work has continued, *"especially after a complex period under judicial administration due to internal problems, the Brotherhood has resumed a path of greater responsibility and ecclesial maturity. It has been proposed that those who wish to join actively participate in the formative moments of the parish. Those who cannot or do not wish to do so are respectfully invited to consider whether their place lies elsewhere. The number of members has been reduced, but the authenticity of the devotional gesture has been recovered. The objective is to safeguard the profound religious meaning of the procession, which should not be confused with a mere social or cultural celebration".*

The spiritual dimension is always present; it is the axis that articulates ecclesial belonging, the recognition of wounds, and vocational discernment.

EVALUATION OF THE GOOD PRACTICE ACCORDING TO THE MAIN PARAMETERS

POSITIVE IMPACT

The parish projects have generated a positive impact, although it is not easy *"to measure it with conventional sociological criteria."* This is a community that expects a lot from its parish priest and does not hide it. The most evident results are found in the *Camminando* project: *"There are about thirty or forty women who, over the years, have become aware of their dignity, of the importance of defending their rights."* Being a problem with its origin in another latitude and given the constant flow: *"starting tomorrow, another thirty will arrive. There is a new migratory wave from Latin America. Some are just now finding the courage to speak out".* Thanks to a pastoral approach based on closeness and listening, the emphasis is placed on accompaniment rather than quantitative indicators: *"There is no objective response. This goes beyond what is measurable: it is constant and necessary accompaniment".*

SUSTAINABILITY

Economically, the *Camminando* project is sustainable and secure, not depending on external funds: *"One of the objectives was to achieve self-sustainability, systematically rejecting all tenders".* A sense of responsibility accompanies the management of the *Camminando* project: *"The person who works here was hired when the parish was sure it could pay a regular salary".* Instability does not accompany the actions of Santo Stefano parish; the *Camminando* project has structural and ethical sustainability.

INNOVATION

In the daily activities, there is a continuous movement to innovation: *"it happens daily: there are no recipes".* This is part of the pastor's tuning with his community, even though the reality is *"so changing that he prevents rigid planning. In the city of Milan, there are completely different areas, and moreover, the situation of migrants is by nature fluid. Pastoral work cannot be repeated or copied: it must be reconsidered constantly".* A clear example is the *Camminando* project itself, which was not originally foreseen in the pastoral plan: *"it was born three months later,*

and three months before we couldn't even imagine it". Regarding the upcoming 2025 plan: *"By the time we publish it, it will already be outdated".*

EFFECTIVENESS

In general, the actions are effective because they avoid setting "*impossible goals. Dreams are one thing"*, which need to be nurtured, but *"aims are another issue".* However, there is a major goal that the parish has set as a target: *"the unity of the community".* The lack of unity is *"a serious problem."*

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

A community so close to its parish priest also participates intensely: *"sometimes I have to restrain myself a bit because one can get carried away by enthusiasm, but as Jesus would say, before starting to build the tower, one must sit down and calculate whether it can be completed".*

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

Although there is a willingness to collaborate with external structures, these are *"somewhat avoided",* out of a desire to *"preserve the parish's full autonomy,",* and to avoid the risk of *"becoming too tied, especially to institutions".*

REPLICABILITY

Despite being highly praised, *"it is not directly replicable. Even pastoral projects cannot be mechanically transferred because it's like a suit: it must be tailor-made".* This is the parish priest's communication line with his communities, who authentically *"gives himself completely, burning out for others".* In an efficient Lombardy, *"the average Ambrosian priest is like this",* even though they themselves recognize their faults in efficiency-driven attitudes or self-referentiality; the commitment is total, in this, they are all alike. An attempt to replicate the *Camminando* project was made in Monza (a city close to Milan, belonging to the same Diocese), but it was not possible: *"Its principles can be transferred, if adapted to the context."* The reason lies in the differences in *"resources, public offices, social rhythms. Just the fact that the police station changes alter the entire documentation process. You can't just transfer it. But the underlying principles, yes".*

II. PLACES OF DIGNITY, LISTENING, AND RESTORATION

A REFUGE OF DIGNITY AND SILENCE, CARMELITE MISSIONARIES, ROMANIA

Country and Place: Romania, Bucharest

Initiative: Against human trafficking and gender-based violence

Beneficiaries: 14 (2023), 10 (2024)

Theme: Violence against migrant women

Project duration: Since 2004 to date

Funding source: Congregation and donations

Website: https://www.carmelitasmisioneras.org

Catholic organization: Carmelite Missionaries

The Carmelite Missionaries arrived in Romania as an expression of the Carmelite charism of prayer, in the style of Saint Teresa of Avila and her founding father, Francesco Palau. They felt called to serve the Church according to their charism in mission and have been present in Romania since 2002. *"Since early 2004, the sisters began to become more involved in the problem of human trafficking because Romania is one of the Eastern European countries where human trafficking is widespread, and therefore there is both internal and external trafficking in Western countries",* say Consecrated Sister C.C., a Carmelite Missionaries.[7]

Over time, *"since we took on this mission, we have committed to better structuring our service to women. We already had a room availa-*

7 All passages in quotation marks and italics correspond to the interviewee.

ble, we collaborated with other associations in the fight against human trafficking, and we welcomed young women who had experienced violence, trafficking, and domestic abuse". In Romania, domestic violence is widespread, and the social need is urgent.

Over the years, they built a shelter on the grounds of the same house, where there is a small wooden church in the traditional style of the Maramureș region. *"People don't realize it exists because we have no external signs - all they see is a monastery, a convent. They don't know that we welcome women in harsh situations here".*

In recent years, women from Africa (especially Ethiopia) and Asia (Sri Lanka, the Philippines) have arrived. These women come through employment agencies with whom they are indebted, and - once in Romania - they often find themselves in situations of labour exploitation or even sexual abuse. In this context, the Carmelite community in Bucharest is part of an informal network of NGOs. They welcome these women - sometimes with children - and respect the different religions they profess: Islam, Christian (Protestant, Catholic, Pentecostal) or others.

The goal is to offer them peace and calm, to help them reconnect with themselves in a serene and silent space, after painful experiences. They are invited to participate in liturgies, and occasionally Ramadan has also been celebrated with them. *"Our spiritual accompaniment is above all about human closeness - it means not forcing them to tell everything they have been through, but respecting their time and their process, so they can truly feel at home, find themselves again, and begin to think about their future. In some cases, they haven't been able to stay in the country or find work and have had to return to their countries of origin - Sri Lanka or Ethiopia"*.

The community consists of three religious sisters - two Polish and one Italian - as well as a social worker and a psychologist. However, not all the women are willing to start an individual psychotherapy. For this reason, group-based activities, such as group therapy, are offered to these women, allowing them to gradually express their emotions and concerns.

EVALUATION OF THE GOOD PRACTICE ACCORDING TO THE MAIN PARAMETERS

POSITIVE IMPACT

The activities have a positive impact, although many times the goals are not fully achieved because the migrant women don't respond, and they make other decisions. *"They will always remember the experience they had here, because we welcomed them as Catholic nuns with a human sense, listening to them, and accepting them as they are".* On the other hand, the sisters believe that "*it is an experience of God. We tell them that they are loved by God despite everything".*

SUSTAINABILITY

So far, only Providence has sustained this mission, but other sources of funding are also being sought to maintain and develop the project. *"Perhaps the Lord can inspire us to improve, but it is certainly important to seek resources and have specialized personnel. Because we want it to be a specialized center that maintains human quality, closeness, and family feeling. But sometimes we lack professional tools that help us more".* Compared to other European countries, the Romanian government does not actively collaborate with the private. The community is moving forward thanks to the support of the Congregation and donations.

INNOVATION

The approach to the women welcomed has been innovative. *"Before, we wanted to do things together with them, but instead we saw that it was better for them, each mother with a child, to have their own rhythms and organize themselves in their own way. Those who come from another country have their own customs. We have introduced group therapy to help with the expression of feelings through art therapy, when they don't want to participate in psychotherapy. Is is not easy, but it helps. We don't want to force them. It has been understood that it is essential to promote their autonomy".*

EFFECTIVENESS

The program is effective because *"the women feel good, like at home. Perhaps better. They feel that the trust and familiarity of this place make them feel at home. Trust and familiarity generate a feeling of home".*

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

Although not all participate actively, many are attentive and grateful. We seek to motivate them to collaborate in the care of the garden and the house. This participation is part of the therapeutic process. *"Like all these types of community, there are internal regulations, and these regulations state that you must participate in the order and care of the rooms in the house".*

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

At the level of private organizations, there is an effective collaboration. *"There are other secular and even religious organizations with which we collaborate closely, as we exchange a lot of information on legislative issues, changes in the system, and similar topics, as well as on the situation of individuals and various problems that arise at the state level"*. The community is part of the RENATE network and Talitha Kum.

REPLICABILITY

The experience is replicable, especially in large cities with a high presence of migrants. *"In the more rural and poorer areas of Bucharest, the situation remains more difficult, even more difficult to enforce people's rights".*

CHARISMATIC SHELTER, INSTITUTE OF THE ADORERS, HANDMAIDS OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT AND OF CHARITY, PORTUGAL

Country and Place: Portugal, Lisbon.

Initiative: Long-term spiritual and material accompaniment of women survivors of trafficking and domestic exploitation

Beneficiaries: Migrant women, particularly from former Portuguese colonies (Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea-Conakry, Angola, Senegal)

Theme: Human trafficking, spiritual healing, social reintegration, female empowerment

Project duration: Since 2000 to date

Funding source: Portuguese Social Security, private donors, Catholic Church support

Website: www.adoratrices.com

Catholic organization: Institute of the Adorers, Handmaids of the Blessed Sacrament and of Charity (Adoratrices)

The congregation was born in Madrid, Spain, thanks to the spiritual transformation of the Viscountess of Jorbalán (also known as the Countess of Vega del Pozo). In the cloister, she was called Mother Sacramento. She is the founder of the Institute of Adorers of the Most Holy Sacrament (1884). In a Madrid marked by widespread prostitution, she became aware of this tragedy: women being sold, deceived, and exploited. She assisted those hospitalized with venereal diseases. She changed her own life to help them and managed to transform the lives of these women.

The religious sisters, Adorers, Handmaids of the Blessed Sacrament and of Charity, follow her example by welcoming African migrant women and offering them protection. Charity, for them, encompasses many things. It means giving their lives in the Eucharist, giving their lives for helpless women. They founded several houses in Spain and Italy and are now present in twenty-seven countries. The house in Portugal was created as a refuge during the Spanish Civil War of 1936, when 27 sisters were murdered.

The religious sisters visit women in vulnerable situations and help them change their lives. Other women actively seek shelter at the house, especially those from former Portuguese colonies such as Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea-Conakry, and also Senegal. "*When I talk about trafficking, I also mean family trafficking. There's human trafficking at the intra-family level, because a cousin brings her to Portugal, and she believes it's to study—then she realizes it's for exploitation. This is made worse by psychological harassment, which convinces them they have no other future",* says Sister M.J.B., Director of the Adorers' Shelter in Lisbon, Portugal[8].

In Guinea and Angola, the violence *"often comes from the women of the family: physical violence followed by sexual exploitation".*

At the shelter, *"we work from the perspective of our charism. Listening, as Pope Francis says, active listening, in the sense of deeply understanding what is happening, knowing how to feel compassion, how to welcome with the heart, with tenderness. If a hug is needed, we give one. If someone needs us during a night of nightmares, we stay by her side. These aspects of the soul, of the heart, are what we sisters call charismatic presence".*

Through the closeness of the three religious sisters living in the house, they "*make each person feel wanted, loved, respected, and that is what gives them the strength to take the leap toward a different life. I'm not diminishing the value of professionals. Each one fulfils their role. What we sisters do bring us closer to the attitudes of Jesus. We look at them with the eyes of Jesus".*

The main program, *Rise Up*, lasts five years. The shelter responds to both material and spiritual needs. *"It has a proven 98% success rate, meaning it helps women reintegrate into society and empowers them to achieve autonomy".* The three sisters, with their charism, actively listen to them, striving to truly understand what they are experiencing. They welcome them wholeheartedly, with tenderness. *"They respond to their lack of affection and are present with them during nights of nightmares".* A partner association also supports couples during courtship and marriage. These relationships are often deeply fragile and require years of support after being harmed by betrayal or abandonment from their family of origin.

8 All passages in quotation marks and italics correspond to the interviewee.

EVALUATION OF THE GOOD PRACTICE ACCORDING TO THE MAIN PARAMETERS

POSITIVE IMPACT

The goal of the shelter is to achieve social reintegration with autonomy and freedom, with all rights, because these women arrive without any network or family, without any resources, without anything. The shelter provides them with a safe environment, effective protection, psychological support, and spiritual guidance. *"Success is achieved through an educational process that transforms them from a burden into a resource, contributing to the renewal of Portuguese society through their children".*

SUSTAINABILITY

"We have a cooperation protocol with the Portuguese State, through social security, which covers 65% of the expenses; the other part comes from the Church resources". They receive food supplies from companies, hotels, and restaurants, as well as donations from private individuals. The three religious sisters in their late 80s do not receive salaries. *"Younger sisters prefer to support vulnerable women by providing comfort and material assistance, rather than offering long-term care at the Shelter".* The Foundation of the same name, approved by the Episcopal Conference of Portugal and by the Government, is the legal backer of this project in Lisbon and Coimbra.

INNOVATION

"The project and its methodology were born in 2000; so far, there has been no specific innovation since there". They have granted greater autonomy to the shelters, building close relationships with the residents, caring for their children, and ensuring their families do not find them. They practice the pedagogy of love. They respond to current issues, such as the deportation of irregular migrants, with the help of specialized lawyers. *"We have a protocol with the City Council, which provides the shelters, after a year of treatment at our Shelter, with a room in outlying neighbourhood; they receive training to avoid problems. The City Council find them jobs and always have the spiritual guidance of the religious sisters".*

EFFECTIVENESS

The project's success is revealed *"in the emotional and social recovery of the women who receive care; 98% of them are able to restart their lives independently".* The religious sisters continue to accompany and monitor them closely, ensuring job holding, school attendance for their children, and stable neighbourhood integration: *"they develop active citizenship".*

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

In the first phase of treatment, the women are very receptive; *"later they become the protagonists of their own project; they have the desire to work, to be independent, to have autonomy".*

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

"We work closely with the municipality and the institutions". As said before, they receive 65% of their funding from the state and maintain a network of hotels and restaurants that supply food. A group of volunteers arrives to play with the children while host families participate in theatre-based therapy sessions. *"If there is pressure on the government to expel irregular migrants, we demonstrate that our host families are a productive resource for Portuguese society and they bring in children the country hasn't, so regenerating our society".*

REPLICABILITY

The comprehensive host model, with a strong emphasis on spiritual guidance, can be replicated in other regions affected by trafficking and gender-based violence. The experience gained in Portugal *"offers valuable keys for adapting it to different local contexts. It is spirituality that brings about inner transformation, deep, lasting change."*

INTER-CONGREGATIONAL COMMUNITY WELCOMING MIGRANTS, INTERNATIONAL UNION OF SUPERIORS GENERAL (UISG) AND MISSIONARY DAUGHTERS OF MARY, ITALY

Country and place: Italy, Lampedusa

Initiative: Inter-congregational community welcoming migrants in Lampedusa, coordinated by the UISG

Beneficiaries: Recently disembarked migrants and asylum seekers

Theme: Spiritual and human welcome upon first arrival; religious synodality

Project duration: Since 2013; in its current form since 2023 to date

Funding source: Donations from UISG member congregations and other sources of Providence

Website: https://tinyurl.com/uisg-lampedusa

Catholic organization: UISG – International Union of Superiors General & Missionary Daughters of Mary

It was October 2013, and Pope Francis had just been elected, when more than 350 people drowned off the coast of Lampedusa. It was then that the Pope asked if there were any religious sisters on the island. The International Union of Superiors General (UISG) launched a call, and thus inter-congregational communities began to form with the goal of welcoming migrants in a spirit of synodality, acting together, without formal hierarchies.

The current community of Lampedusa was consolidated in 2023. *"It is composed of four sisters from Belgium, Romania, India, and Italy, belonging to four different congregations: the Little Sisters of Jesus, the Sisters of Providence, the Sisters of the Holy Cross, and the Dorothean Sisters, and from the Daughters of Mary Missionary,"* says Sr. A.P. Superior General of the Missionary Daughters of Mary and Coordinator of the UISG Migrants Project in Sicily[9].

9 All passages in quotation marks and italics correspond to the interviewee.

A fifth sister could join them soon. It is an itinerant community, open to renewal and the admission of new sisters. The itinerant nature of the mission means that the sisters arrive from different countries and congregations for limited periods of time, offering a healthy rotation that prevents burnout and fosters openness to new perspectives and strengths. This means that the inter-congregational community is constantly evolving. While there are four sisters residing in Lampedusa for a period of three years, other sisters are regularly invited to join for shorter stays—be it a week, a month, or more. The community remains *"in itinere,"* open to movement and renewal within its structure. Their primary mission is to offer immediate welcome to migrants arriving in Lampedusa: a human, spiritual, and fraternal presence at their first contact, after extremely difficult journeys marked by abuse, violence, and suffering. *"Our presence is not one of activity, it is simply a presence that says: 'We are here to welcome you'… we are, in a way, the maternal face of God".* At the same time, they accompany the local population, visiting families, bringing Communion to the sick, and assisting the elderly. In a context fraught with prejudice, their testimony is revealing; for example, most migrant women do not arrive intentionally pregnant, as some claim, but are victims of rape during the journey. Some have given birth alone, after surviving a series of horrors; others carry a child in their arms, the fruit of rape on the long journey to Lampedusa. *"When they arrive at the dock, we drop everything to be there, look them in the eyes, hold their hands, and make them feel welcome. Each landing is unique: there may be only one woman, unaccompanied minors, adults who don't speak the same language. We try to be sisters".*

Despite all the difficulties, also the population of Lampedusa has shown great generosity toward those seeking refuge. On this island, where health care, education, and other basic services are limited, the sisters represent a living presence of hope and active solidarity. *"Many of the migrants we cared for later sought us out; we also go to say goodbye to them when they leave for Porto Empedocle: that's how a bond is built".*

EVALUATION OF THE GOOD PRACTICE ACCORDING TO THE MAIN PARAMETERS

POSITIVE IMPACT

The UISG project with the inter-congregational community has had an immediate and profound impact in Lampedusa, offering human and spiritual accompaniment to migrants who have survived extreme situations. *"One of the most beautiful things a migrant said it was that what he had most touched him was the smile of a sister who welcomed him at the dock".* Furthermore, their presence has raised awareness among the local population, demonstrating that the spirit of welcome and solidarity remains alive. The sisters reaffirm the dignity of every human being in a context of extreme fragility.

SUSTAINABILITY

The project is supported by the UISG, which coordinates the rotation of the sisters every three years, ensuring continuity without overburdening those involved. Their simple and communal way of life strengthens both spiritual and practical sustainability. *"We receive many offers; the superiors general sent sisters, but they also help financially. Sustainability is based on Providence and donations".*

INNOVATION

In this community, there is no superior; everything is decided together: *"it is a concrete way of living synodality each day: from who goes to the dock, to when we pray, cook, or visit the sick. This breaks with the traditional model and opens a shared experience of discernment".* Presence, listening, and welcome are prioritized over formal or service-based structures.

EFFECTIVENESS

The effectiveness of this experience is silent yet real: in an environment marked by institutional and social fatigue, their very presence restores hope, rebuilds human bonds, and facilitates emotional healing processes for the most traumatized migrants. *"There hasn't been*

a single person who refused to look at us in the eye. I've never seen anyone turn away from our gaze."

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

The sisters impose nothing to anyone: they integrate themselves into the rhythm of life on the island and with those arriving. Through daily dialogue and shared living, real problems and needs emerge. *"To the extent that you try to welcome people, they feel welcomed and become involved. If you exclude them, they will look elsewhere—and not always to good places".*

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

The community works closely with the local Church, the First Aid Center, the Red Cross, health authorities, and civil volunteers. They do so without seeking visibility, with respect, humility, and effectiveness, building strong networks of support. *"At first, the police looked at us with suspicion; now they asked us to pray for their girlfriends or mothers".*

REPLICABILITY

This model has the potential to be replicated in other border situations, thanks to its flexibility, modesty, and spiritual foundation. It offers a presence that transforms without imposing structures — because what it offers is simply humanity. *"Without a doubt, it should be replicated in every border situation; it's a way of saying: you have been through so much tragedy, but here, God welcomes you".* This model has already been replicated in other border areas. In Sicily, before the COVID-19 pandemic, similar inter-congregational communities operated in Agrigento, Rammacca, and Caltanissetta. More recently, during a UISG assembly, it was reported that a comparable initiative is taking place at the southern border of the United States, near Texas.

A SPIRITUAL OASIS OF MERCY, THE ORDER OF THE DISCALCED CARMELITES OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY OF MOUNT CARMEL, BELGIUM

Country and Place: Belgium, Brussels

Initiative: A Spiritual Oasis of Mercy – Carmelites in Brussels

Beneficiaries: People experiencing homelessness, including migrants and undocumented individuals; local faithful in spiritual search; catechumens and vulnerable families

Theme: Spiritual accompaniment; urban poverty; interreligious dialogue; social inclusion; sacraments and adult catechesis; service network and hospitality

Project Duration: Since 2017 to date

Source of Funds: Donations from individuals and charitable foundations; partial support from the Carmelite Order (Province of Venice)

Website: To be confirmed

Catholic Organization: Discalced Carmelite Fathers – Community in Brussels, Province of Venice

The Congregation of the Discalced Carmelites, officially the Order of the Discalced Carmelites of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel, are a branch of the Carmelite Order, focused on a contemplative life of prayer and ministry. In 1562, Saint Teresa of Jesus carried out a reform of the religious order and founded the first convent of Discalced Carmelites in the city of Ávila, Spain. Later, together with Saint John of the Cross, she founded the Discalced Carmelite branch, to return to a God-cantered life with all simplicity and poverty, like that of the first 13th-century hermits of Mount Carmel, who followed the example of the prophet Elijah.

The Church of the Discalced Carmelites in Brussels is quite central, located at a crossroads of different neighbourhoods and corresponding to different social classes: there is the Louise Quarter, which is more bourgeois with large shops; there is Matonge, a very popular African

neighbourhood; not far away is the European Institutions district; the other working-class neighbourhood is the Marolle[10]. Being a *"rich, affluent area, there is a crossroads of cultures, even the faithful who come to our Church are very mixed in terms of social classes and nationalities*", explains Father S.C. of the Discalced Carmelite Church, present in Belgium for thirty years.

According to the Belgian Civil Service Department, in 2023, 7.289 people were homeless in Brussels, an increase of 15.4% compared to the previous year. Out of these, 55.2% had been homeless for more than a year, indicating the chronic nature of the problem; one in four people is homeless for migration reasons. 44% come from non-European countries and 11,2% from EU countries. Out of these, 51.3% lack a valid residence document, highlighting the overlap between the challenges of immigration and social exclusion. People without a residence permit represent 45% of those sleeping in public spaces and 53% of those squatting in buildings.

Every day, the church doors are open for two hours for the sacrament of Confession. *"We are one of the churches in Brussels where there is a time for confessions every day and to meet with a priest for the sacrament of confession from 4:30 p.m. to 6:30 pm".* They come not strictly for the sacrament of confession, *"but also for situations of spiritual accompaniment, for counselling about important decisions".* This closeness to the faithful comforts them. During a recent meeting with the Bishop of Brussels, *"we asked him what the Church of Brussels expects from the Discalced Carmelites at this time. Monsignor Terlinden said: 'if I think of you, I think of two things: prayer and charity'. And to be more specific, he says: 'for me, you are an oasis of mercy in the city'. It is a beautiful expression that flatters us, but it also inspires us to be responsible for this mission. It is moving that our presence is perceived as an oasis of mercy, and as a place where sacramental mercy is lived, with the desire to welcome needs and concerns, through listening and accompaniment".*

Knowing "*the existence of areas of poverty, despite being a European capital, made in particular by those who do not fit into the mechanism: who do not have work, do not have documents, etc., the idea is to create networks with other associations to respond to the different social and legal needs*".

10 The following passages in quotation marks and italics are statements from the interviewee.

The Carmelites have created a fixed point, very small, but it is weekly, *"going to meet the people who are right in our neighbourhood bringing hot soup on Wednesday nights; for us as a Church it was truly the desire that the kingdom of heaven transcend the walls of the Church".* The desire was *"to bring the love of Christ to those living in situations of suffering around us".*

One experience currently in its first phase *"is hosting some migrant homeless people in a part of the convent to sleep. There are five of them right now, but we also want to accompany them so they may reach independence".* One of them is Congolese; although Catholic, he had not been baptized. They prepared him for baptism, *"so he completed the catechumenate, and on Easter Sunday, two years ago, we celebrated his baptism".* One of the hosted people *"is Muslim, another is a stateless Mongolian with no religious affiliation, then there's an Orthodox man, and then there are Catholics".* They are trying to help them *"avoid falling into welfare dependency. We offer them a little support, for example, through active job search and training policies".* On the other hand, there are many difficulties: *"to get a job, you need a residential address. No one gives you a residence permit if you don't have a job, and it's a vicious cycle. And let's say that here, most of the poor are immigrants who have difficulty legalizing their status".*

The idea has emerged *"of accrediting civil service volunteers with us to accompany this reality, this experience of proximity to the poor, to the migrants".*

EVALUATION OF THE GOOD PRACTICE ACCORDING TO THE MAIN PARAMETERS

POSITIVE IMPACT

There are three positive impacts: *"the first is the people who come to church. There are no beggars at the door. Everyone is together inside, either to hear Mass or to pray to the Virgin Mary. It is the first sign of the Kingdom of God. There is a breaking down of barriers between the faithful, who are all children of God."* The second impact *"is on our internal community as a religious community. It is obviously a bit of a struggle also opening ourselves up to social action, and paying attention to different sensitivities of poor people, while respecting those who need*

their own space. This, therefore, is also work that is not taken for granted; it also transforms us as a religious community". The third impact is *"on who we help. It is positive because they feel welcome, even though we don't always arrive at the complete solution. And also, with whom we help, getting to know so many associations "that are not necessarily Christian. As Pope Francis said: 'we are no longer the centre of the people', but we learn to collaborate with others who seek the good of the people in a different way, perhaps with different motivations, but we meet and can also bear witness to the faith in this way".*

SUSTAINABILITY

"Next year presents a challenge, as it is the first year we'll have civil service. It remains to be seen whether it was a temporary experience or if it can be stabilized. It requires a structure with other lay people involved, not just those who support the friars." Although it is an initiative that emerged from the friars' spiritual motivations, *"it needs to be structured more financially stable. We had a donation that allowed us to start, and other people want to allocate donations occasionally to the poor. The project should be planned; that is the challenge we have to face, without losing the originality of being a small entity that responds to specific needs".*

INNOVATION

It has been a process of *"experience, mistakes, and lessons learned. It has also been a process of leveraging the experience of other associations, even if they are different."* Specifically, with the hosting of the five people, *"we introduced the rule that they don't stay in their rooms in the morning, but they should leave their rooms after nine o'clock. Perhaps the greatest charity would be to offer employment to people living on the streets, even for very simple cleaning tasks. We've tasked one of them with cleaning the chicken coop; it's her weekly reference point. It's almost more important to provide a job than a place to sleep. Because providing a place to sleep without offering a structure for the day is a small flaw we've detected: there's a risk of not helping people, but rather forcing them to stay. It takes effort, but it's truly educational".*

EFFECTIVENESS

Whether it's finding a home or solving material problems, "*the effectiveness isn't very high. But, from the perspective of spiritual guidance, yes, it is. For a few months now, two volunteers have organized a dinner on Mondays. We welcome the faithful. If the newcomers become independent, as we hope, so they no longer live here, they can feel part of a community and enjoy a moment of fellowship. We always provide spiritual guidance and closeness".*

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

With the desire to involve them, *"we ask them to clean their rooms, although the result isn't optimal. On Thursdays, when the Church is closed, two of them clean the building. It's precisely to make them feel involved in the care of the house, where they are also welcome. It's not a payment, because it wouldn't be adequate. It's about caring, about participating. When we organize a flea market for our missions, they also collaborate. Sometimes, one or two of them come with us to carry soup on the street. That's how we try to involve them; that's the challenge".*

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

The associations involved in the project "*collaborate on almost equal terms. Sometimes, if they need a Romanian translation or assistance with a procedure or request at the municipality, they ask me, and I help them. These are the kinds of collaborative relationships that we are building for the future*".

REPLICABILITY

The project is certainly replicable: *"Each community should do this because we don't solve major problems, but if each community solved or opened up to the problems it has in its territory, then the problems would diminish".*

DAR HOSEA, RESTORING DIGNITY – AN ACT OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE, SISTERS OF CHARITY OF SAINT GIOVANNA ANTIDA THOURET, MALTA

Country: Malta

Initiative: Dar Hosea, Restoring Dignity – An Act of Unconditional Love

Beneficiaries: Maltese women in vulnerable situations and migrant women deprived of their liberty.

Theme: Shelter, psychological support, spiritual accompaniment, reintegration

Project Duration: Since 2011 to date

Source of Funds: Donations from individuals, Charity Shop, Congregation resources

Website: www.darhosea.org

Catholic Organization: Sisters of Charity of Saint Giovanna Antida Thouret

According to the Old Testament, God asked the prophet Hosea to marry a prostitute, love her, and respect her as a sign of his fidelity to an unfaithful people. His name, Hosea, means *"salvation"*. That same spirit inspires the Dar Hosea project, a shelter founded in Malta by women of faith—both religious and lay—to accompany women marked by prostitution, drug addiction, and years of imprisonment, often for crimes related to drug trafficking. Their entry into that world was not the result of a free choice, but rather the consequence of manipulation, coercion, or extreme need. Their experience with imprisoned women led the group to expand their mission: today they visit regularly the prison female section, where there are some migrant women who are imprisoned for crimes that often carry long sentences. They meet these women without judging, without interrogating, without imposing; they are simply a presence. It is a spiritual accompaniment comprised of closeness, language courses, crafts, listening, and deep respect.

Dar Hosea opens its doors every day to homeless women. Many are Maltese women in vulnerable situations, and some are women with a migratory background. There they find the essentials: food, hygiene, rest, medical care, psychological support, and legal guidance. But not only it. They also receive unconditional hospitality, trust, and presence.

The mission of the Santa Giovanna Antida Thouret Foundation[11] is *"to reach out to people with various vulnerabilities who are not addressed by any entity, whether ecclesiastical or state".* (Sr N.A.). They are the Sisters of Charity of Saint Giovanna Antida Thouret (suoredellacarita.org), *"a congregation that began in France in 1799 and in Malta in 1868. Their charism is the spiritual and temporal service of the poor. As Sisters of Charity, they take a fourth vow of service to the poor".*

M.B., a mother, was the first of the 61 volunteers to form part of the lay and religious support group eleven years ago. Their work is more than just a social service; it is a spirituality embodied in action. Faith is not imposed but lived in the act of giving without expecting anything in return. *"Service is based on three pillars: direct service with the social workers; as we need funds, we have a Charity Shop, and – third pillar – the prayer. Every month we hold an Adoration open for the staff and volunteers"* (Sr. N.A.).

EVALUATION OF THE GOOD PRACTICE ACCORDING TO THE MAIN PARAMETERS

POSITIVE IMPACT

The spirituality lived at Dar Hosea embodies what Blaise Pascal said: *"I go to Church, and I come out more human".* Some women manage to go a step further: they discover they can rebuild their lives, find work, and rebuild themselves. Several have returned as volunteers, becoming living testimony that hope is possible.

11 The following passages in quotation marks and italics are statements from the interviewee.

SUSTAINABILITY

After eleven years of activity, they are convinced that *"it is a work that God wants"*. Its continued existence is based on the support of the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Giovanna Antida Thouré, private donations, and a Charity Shop run by volunteers. If one day it were to cease to exist, they say, *"it would be because prostitution has disappeared, and that would be a great joy for all"*.

INNOVATION

The practice is structured around three pillars: direct service, concrete sustainability (the Charity Shop), and shared prayer. *"We know that without inner strength, this is a very difficult service: accompanying women who are constantly abused, whom society is not always willing to love or welcome"*. The model avoids moralizing and provides time, space, and humanity for those seeking to rebuild their lives.

EFFECTIVENESS

The promoters of the project are convinced of the effectiveness of their action, even in the absence of immediately tangible indicators: *"relapses happen, but then they get back on their feet. Even if it seems like a failure, we don't despair. We always have hope; the path is one of true accompaniment, a process that allows us to grow, strengthen our inner selves, and find alternatives"*.

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

At Dar Hosea, trust and the desire to build authentic relationships prevail. *"Revelations emerge during everyday life, and this creates bonds of mutual support"*. The house is a space where self-esteem is rebuilt through shared words and active listening.

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

Participation is reflected in the silent commitment of the volunteers, who deeply believe in the transformative impact of their work. They also promote advocacy: *"We are the voice of these women who have no voice"*.

REPLICABILITY

The practice is replicable, with one condition: preserving its "human scale". *"If it becomes an institution, you lose personal contact, which is precisely what gives us the light to improve the service. It is better to have three centres like Dar Hosea than one large one"*. As Pope Francis reminds us: *"Do not close in on yourselves!"* According to the promoters, rules and bureaucracy must not stifle human encounter, which is at the heart of all pastoral care.

III. SPIRITUAL ACCOMPANIMENT AND PASTORAL ENGAGEMENT

DON BOSCO LIVES IN HELENENBERG, SALESIANS, GERMANY

Country and Place: Germany, Helenenberg

Initiative: Home, Education, Leisure, Religion

Beneficiaries: Migrants from Afghanistan, Syria, Africa

Theme: Education and Spiritual Accompaniment

Project Duration: 2015 to date

Funding Source: German State

Website: www.donbosco.de

Catholic Organization: Salesians

Since 2015, the German social administration has been required to welcome migrant minors. The Salesians have been involved in this process. *"I have been working in youth ministry in various sectors for the past fifteen years, and for the last ten years also with migrant youth",* says Father M.v.S., Pastoral Representative of the Don Bosco Helenenberg Youth Welfare Center[12]. About the young migrant people, he notes: *"one-third came from Afghanistan, one-third from Syria, and one-third from African countries: Somalia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, and Sierra Leone".* The Youth Service (*Jugendamt*) entrusts institutions like the Salesians with providing housing, food, education, training, and everything else these young people need. This service is funded by the municipal social administration. Lindenberg is home to a prominent institution: the *Jugendhilfezentrum*, a social assistance centre for minors at risk, run by the Salesian Congregation of Don Bosco, which has six centres in Germany.

12 All passages in quotation marks and italics correspond to the interviewee.

Upon arrival as unaccompanied minors, their health status, family situation (whether they have relatives in Germany), the conditions in their home country, language proficiency, and legal needs are assessed. They are assigned a legal guardian—usually the Youth Service — and their asylum application is prepared. If asylum is not granted, they must return to their home country upon reaching 18 or be sent to another country in accordance with the Dublin II and III Treaties.

From the outset, they are integrated into school to prevent them from remaining inactive. The children's educational and linguistic levels are very different: *"There are those who can't write and others who know English or Russian, depending on their origins, but also on the context. There were people from Afghanistan who came from the embassy environment and others who were shepherds."* They range in age from 9 to 18. *"They knew I was a priest because most of them were Muslim, but not all."* The teachers at the Centre have roots in Afghanistan and Latin America. *"There is a sense of what it's like to live in a foreign country."* As Christians, the Salesians respect all religions*: "for us, it's very important. My goal was always to talk about religion, about the religion itself, and we always tried to do everything possible to get everyone to go to the mosque, participate in Muslim and Christian celebration. Even with the language limitations, I propose a short reflection on issues of ethics and religion. I hold these on Sunday nights before they go to their rooms. It is well received; they participate voluntarily. "They ask me all about our church. They want to see it. They help me clean it. All of this is perfectly normal".*

He has baptized some of them, *"not many; they are converted"*. Spiritual accompaniment has been a transformation that is part of the whole in the Salesian sense. *"We always have four sectors of Don Bosco's style: the house that welcomes them is the first step. Then, school, they understand that they can learn with us. Then, free time, doing things together, and the fourth is religion, and that means they find respect for their religion with us, recognition. In other words, I recognize everyone's faith."*

EVALUATION OF THE GOOD PRACTICE ACCORDING TO THE MAIN PARAMETERS

POSITIVE IMPACT

"I have arrived after a long journey" marks the beginning of a new stage. The young people *"were welcomed"* and begin to take responsibility for their lives and education. They are accepted as they are, with a clear proposal, *"and the request is to accept whatever they encounter with a certain level of tolerance and non-violence. Accept non-violence. Some accept it, not all."* They stay in touch, are invited to the Congregation's festival each year, and retain a card that allows them to be received in other Salesian houses.

SUSTAINABILITY

The Congregation works under the mandate of the municipality or region. The State has an obligation to offer educational and training services to minors, and the Salesians provide these services with properly controlled public resources. *"The biggest problem today is that we cannot find educational personnel".*

INNOVATION

Young people are not abandoned to their fate: from day one, they attend school, in an educational structure. The proposal follows Don Bosco's characteristic innovative emphasis: *"The symbol of the home, the school, the sports field, which is the space for free time and religion. Sometimes we call it a mosque, depending on where we work."*

EFFECTIVENESS

"We have researched the effectiveness of education for at-risk youth and saw that, with vocational training, the percentage is very high, since they usually have access to society, after the training". It has been proven that all those who complete vocational training find employment, and most of them enter the workforce directly. *"Language proficiency is the foundation, followed by access to employment. Despite the limited social acceptance due to prejudices or electoral interests, the Congregation trusts in the positive potential of these young people for Europe."*

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

Every week, a Council meeting is held with the young people to plan activities, gather suggestions, and evaluate changes, including logistical ones. German youths also participate. *"The young people propose improvements, such as new soccer goals, changes in diet, or internet access. They receive a small subsidy from the state and, upon entering vocational training, a salary that they begin to save."*

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

"We always had contact with the mosque, with its imam, or with Eastern churches, for example, those of Egypt." Visits are organized to learn about their cultures, and they have been invited to creative courses. Engagement depends largely on the initiative of educators. The migrant minors' gratitude is constant.

REPLICABILITY

"Don Bosco's philosophy works all over the world; we didn't invent it, but it is applicable and highly variable, therefore, adaptable on demand. The legal, economic, and financial framework varies in Europe and the European Union from one country to another." Therefore, the possibilities of implementing something similar depend on the country. Respect for all religions is an essential part of spiritual guidance.

FAITH WITHOUT BORDERS: MIGRANTS AND CONVERTS IN THE CHURCH OF DENMARK, CONGREGATION OF THE MOST HOLY REDEEMER, DENMARK

Country and Place: Copenhagen, Denmark

Initiative: Pastoral Care of Migrants and Converts at St. Anne's Church

Beneficiaries: Latin American and Polish migrants

Theme: Integration and Spiritual Accompaniment

Project Duration: Since 2018 to date

Funding Source: Community

Website: stanneschurch.dk/sanktansgar.dk/welcome/espanol

Catholic Organization: Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer

St. Anne's Church, located in the Amager district of Copenhagen, is entrusted to the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer (Redemptorists) of the Warsaw Province, Poland. The community is served by three Polish priests. While based at St. Anne's, each priest also offers pastoral services in other churches across the city. One of them, Father J.S., celebrates Mass in Spanish at St. Ansgar's Cathedral and leads the pastoral care for the Spanish-speaking community. *"We are missionaries in many countries and continents. We also work in parishes. In St. Anne's in Copenhagen, we accompany the Catholic faithful from Denmark, and even more so those who have come from other parts of the world, in various languages"*, explains Father J. S., CssR., Head of the Spanish-speaking Community in Copenhagen[13]. Some priests arrived to assist the community of Spanish-speaking faithful, thanks to their Latin American backgrounds. *"Many from my country, Poland, live in Denmark, and I also serve them with my ministry as a priest."*

The challenges migrants encounter *"are similar to the situations in other countries where people emigrate in search of a better economic life"*. Some don't plan to settle in Denmark: *"they come for a while with the*

13 All passages in quotation marks and italics correspond to the interviewee.

plan of returning to their homeland"; others come to study, and others *"are forced by the situation in their country to leave in search of a different life"*. However, "*the biggest challenge is the language. There are free courses, but Danish is a complicated language".* Without knowledge of it, it's difficult to find a job.

In addition to the cultural and historical differences from the home country, *"the climate is very different",* which creates problems *"in adapting, in finding bonds of friendship, in understanding the way of life that for some of them seems very unwarm and different from what they experienced in their homeland".* Because those who come to live in Denmark *"bring their history, their expectations, and their dreams, which aren't always the same as what they find here".*

The spiritual aspect also presents several challenges, which must be addressed. For the migrants, it's surprising *"that there aren't as many Masses, groups, activities, and opportunities to pursue their spiritual life as in the parishes where they grew up".* Catholics are a minority. There is *"only one diocese in the entire country and not many priests".* Due to the vast distances, *"newcomers to the country sometimes take a few years to find a community in their language".*

The role of migrant ministry in Denmark is *"to accompany and facilitate integration, helping newcomers find support within the community".* One of the pillars of this ministry *"is Sunday Mass, followed by the traditional 'coffee meeting', which has become a fundamental moment for migrants",* where they share experiences and form networks. It is important to note that *"the Danish Catholic community not only helps migrants maintain their faith, but also strengthens their identity".* They visit homes and hospitals, *"hold meetings for families with young children whose parents are concerned about their spiritual education, organise small prayer groups and Bible groups".* The Catholic Church in Denmark "*is made up of foreigners who came with their customs and practices of faith from their country".* Every year, Danish adults *"take conversion courses from the Protestant Church to Catholicism or are adults who request baptism in the Catholic Church".* Over the years, the Catholic community has taken responsibility in parishes, transmitting its experience of the Church in its country to promote a universal sense of faith. They are the catechists who are responsible for liturgical music and care for the community's finances. They also work in charitable organizations and, above all, practice their faith through prayer and personal development as Christians.

EVALUATION OF THE GOOD PRACTICE ACCORDING TO THE MAIN PARAMETERS

POSITIVE IMPACT

"What we propose reaches Catholics; it's not a large number; Denmark is not a very populated country". St. Anne's Church on Amager in Copenhagen is a reference point for those who come, even for a short time. It has been a key reference point for the integration of migrants. *"It has helped many people maintain their faith, find social support, and redefine their relationship with God in a new context".* It has helped many migrants in maintaining *"their faith, build social support, and rediscover their relationship with God in a new context".*

SUSTAINABILITY

The community receives no state or private contribution. The community sustains itself through shared contributions, volunteering and integration into the structure of the host parish.

INNOVATION

What makes this pastoral approach unique is its adaptability to a multicultural setting, blending Latin American fervour, Polish missionary spirit, and Danish openness to ecumenical dialogue. *"As a Polish priest, I draw on my education in my home country; as a Redemptorist, I draw on the experience of our founder, Saint Alphonsus; and as a missionary who has worked in Latin America and the United States, I use what I have learnt to propose a pastoral ministry in a specific location that helps grow and realize the plan of the Diocese in which we live".*

EFFECTIVENESS

The project hasn't enough volunteer staff trained to carry out what is required in the country, *"where there is a continuous growth of the Community".* So, they try to maintain or renew the spiritual resources *"that each one brings so as not to lose the essence of our faith and culture".* The constant presence at Sunday Mass and the fact that they are a consistent group present at another weekly Mass, that is mandatory for us, is confirmation that the community is on the right path.

And again, the fact that *"we maintain the connection with those who have left for other countries or returned to their homeland"* confirms the value of having found in Saint Anne a community that welcomed them.

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

The whole community is involved in catechesis, liturgy and social action. Every member of the community knows that "*everything depends on our participation and effort. Anyone who joins our group realizes that what we do is ours and for us, and that we should not expect anyone to reward us for it*".

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

Strong links have been established with the diocese, local parishes, and aid organizations, creating a structured and efficient support network. Collaboration between the local Church and the community is natural and *"grows when information about the functioning of local structures is shared".*

REPLICABILITY

What community does *"is not very different from communities in other places".* Their pastoral project ***"****is a universal proposal of spiritual accompaniment and support that is natural for the entire Church throughout the world".*

RELIGIOUS SISTERS NETWORK: SPIRITUALITY, SERVICE AND SOLIDARITY, INTERNATIONAL NETWORK OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES OF THE UISG AND MISSIONARY SERVANTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, EUROPE AND LATIN AMERICA

Country and place: Italy, Europe and Latin America

Initiative: Religious Sisters network: Spirituality, Service and Solidarity (International Network of Migrants and Refugees)

Beneficiaries: Religious women from various congregations working on borders or in migrant-hosting territories; indirectly, migrants and refugees

Theme: Spiritual accompaniment, pastoral and psychological education, networking, inter-congregational integration, care for migrants and vulnerable women

Project duration: Since 2015 to date

Funding source: UNHCR (initial project); subsequently, ecclesial support, volunteer work, and self-financing of participating congregations

Website: https://www.uisg.org/es/projects/Migrants-Refugees-Network/

Catholic organization: UISG (International Union of Superiors General).

The International Union of Superiors General (UISG) was born at the end of the Second Vatican Council. It is composed of more than 900 female congregations. They have four joint commissions: health, education, justice and peace, and interreligious dialogue. When the UISG celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in 2015, a project was launched: an inter-congregational community in Sicily with three communities, an initiative focused on the issue of migrants and asylum seekers. They later moved to Lampedusa. *"Although there are many similar initiatives around the world, the sisters are joining together, forming a network, to influence many aspects",* says the project coordinator, Superior General M.C.B. of the Congregation of the Missionary Servants of the Holy Spirit (SSpS).[14]

14 All passages in quotation marks and italics correspond to the interviewee.

Women's congregations are working together in different parts of the world, creating networks with different goals. The first powerful example of these UISG networks is the one about human trafficking. *"The* International Network of Consecrated Life Against Human Trafficking, *named 'Talitha Kum'*[15]*, has been and is a very important reference because it has grown, uniting the sisters; it was created twenty years ago. Human mobility touches on human trafficking",* she continues. *"We sisters never work alone. There is always a sister from another congregation who can and does offer her services; I believe it is part of being a woman".* They are aware that the more ties they have, the stronger the network, and the greater its capacity to truly welcome and support. That is why the International Network of Refugees and Migrants was created at the international level, a magnificent project of the UISG due to the number of congregations and sisters involved, and the results. The network maintains its inter-congregational focus and meets the requirement of being oriented toward migrants and refugees. The *Religious Sisters network: Spirituality, Service and Solidarity* is an important part of this international network. Between 2023 and 2024, the International Network of Refugees and Migrants selected influential sisters from various continents to promote awareness of the Religious Sisters' network on spirituality, service and solidarity in their regions. Following this initial dissemination, training for the religious sisters directly involved in the project began in Rome. The challenge of connecting them with each other as consecrated women has internal advantages: uniting forces, giving them strength and resilience. A feedback process *"make them grow in depth, in addition to responding to what God invites us to, always to communion, like the Trinity".* But also, external advantages: so, the impact is greater. Because each congregation has its own charism and different talents, *"the response expands and benefits our people".*

The network has identified three areas that are interwoven with their religious life, their consecration, and their education: *identity*, everything must be done as consecrated religious women; *education*, from spiritual to professional training; *advocacy*, a field *"where we must be prophets".*

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15 The expression "*Talitha Kum*" comes from the Gospel of Mark (Mk 5:41), where Jesus, taking the hand of a young girl believed to be dead, says: "*Talitha kum*", which means "*Little girl, I say to you, arise*". The girl immediately rises and walks. This biblical passage has become a foundational spiritual reference for many women religious communities, symbolizing a call to restore dignity and life. Inspired by this, *Talitha Kum* is active in over 90 countries, promoting prevention, protection, and reintegration of women and girls affected by trafficking, through grassroots action and international collaboration.

The project's goal is for the sisters to feel supported, to get to know each other, and to know they can count on one another. The project's role is to act as a bridge, and then *"we have to be like the yeast."* It's not important how many of them there are, but rather that they be good and grounded in the real life, so they can help them stay connected. They exchange information because what matters it is not just one project or one Best Practice to shine. *"The important thing is that we bring the salt of the gospel everywhere, for that is what will dignify a person".* At the plenary assembly held in Rome from May 5 to 9, 2025, they evaluated and shared their journey and planned for the future.

Spiritual accompaniment is provided through training in psychological, spiritual and pastoral issues, via the web. It is a networking effort. *"We cannot do social work without a spiritual foundation. And our spiritual foundation will decline if it is not supported by what is happening in the real world. It is a constant cycle of life".* This spiritual accompaniment seeks to strengthen the sisters so that they can support, in a pastoral and community capacity, the migrants and refugees they accompany in their local contexts.

EVALUATION OF THE GOOD PRACTICE ACCORDING TO THE MAIN PARAMETERS

POSITIVE IMPACT

"The impact is very positive. The sisters' awareness is growing. The commitment to religious life is growing. Out of the nine hundred who were present at the UISG Assembly in Rome, more than half of the sisters in the congregations are addressing the issue of migration in one way or another". The positive impact is evident in the strengthening of the role of the religious sisters, the global connection between congregations, and the concrete impact on the migration situation in different continents.

SUSTAINABILITY

The project is sustainable; it has been managed with very limited funding. *"So far, we've maintained ten years of growth, and the presence of the sisters has advanced. We're working at the congregational level,*

where each one can contribute what they can, how they can, and when they can". It is a flexible and committed inter-congregational organisation, which advances even with limited resources, thanks to voluntary involvement and the synergy between charisms.

INNOVATION

"Inter-congregationalism is proof of flexibility and innovation. We are trying to give it life because we feel it's a sign of these times—different congregations coming together, either to live together and carry out a project, or to carry out the project together, even if each of us lives in our own community". Overcoming traditional structures, the openness to innovation is evident, demonstrating vitality and renewal.

EFFECTIVENESS

"Inter-congregationalism offers many possibilities, and so we can act effectively. Effectiveness depends on having prepared the ground well and on the proper education of the sisters. Because good will alone is not enough." They emphasize the importance of good training: religious, theological, psychological, as well as a natural predisposition to teamwork.

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

The main characteristic of the project is a participatory dialogue, *"because you have to be willing to listen and then change. Part of the success of our work is due to that, to our willingness to listen".* This is their system. It is opposed to a vertical one.

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

Collaboration is very broad, with congregations such as the Jesuits and NGOs. *"It's an almost natural transformation that is happening. I am a woman, and as a woman and as a consecrated person, I am moving forward with the dream I have, according to my own identity and with the dream that God has for me. These are occupied spaces where they are needed"*. They also attract collaborations because of the trust they generate.

REPLICABILITY

The project can be replicated very easily. *"It's the desire to be a bridge between all the realities that already exist. If you connect the dots, you create a network, and having a network makes it much easier to support. It's neither expensive nor complicated. The only challenge, because we are human beings, is working as a team".* The structure of the network responds to the goals of the project: the coordinator, the coordination team, and an extended team has been added with a representative from Africa, Latin America, the USA, Lebanon, and Asia, plus three coordinators from other UISG projects to maintain consistency: "Sowing Hope for the Planet", "Talitha Kum", and the project implemented in Lampedusa. Communication with other UISG entities and projects is always maintained. *"In communion, we will truly be able to serve much better".*

THE CHAPLAIN OF HOPE, PALLOTTINE FATHERS (SOCIETY OF THE CATHOLIC APOSTOLATE – SAC), UNITED KINGDOM

Country and place: United Kingdom, British prisons

Initiative: Spiritual accompaniment of migrants detained in prison settings

Beneficiaries: Detained migrants; people deprived of liberty in situations of exclusion, young people in conflict with the law

Topics: Spiritual accompaniment, prison ministry, reconciliation, social reintegration, migrant care

Project Duration: Since 1971 to date

Funding Source: Community donations, volunteering, direct parish support

Website: https://www.sac.info/Wormwood Scrubs Prison

Catholic Organization: Pallottine Fathers (Society of the Catholic Apostolate – SAC)

For more than four decades, Father C., a Pallottine priest, dedicated his life to spiritually accompanying people deprived of liberty—especially migrants detained in the British prison system. He was sent to London the following year. His journey as a prison chaplain began unexpectedly, when he received a call from a London prison requesting a priest for a young Italian man who had slit his wrists and was dying. They were calling for the last rites. *"I went into that prison, and I was struck by what I saw—a maximum-security facility. The young man survived and asked me to return. That's when I realized there were many Italians in prison, even in other institutions",* recalls Father C., Pallottine chaplain[16]. He received credentials and keys from the UK Ministry of Justice, granting him permanent access to the prison. *"A new door opened for me—a reality I didn't know existed. They became my family. I did this for forty years in London."*

16 All passages in quotation marks and italics correspond to the interviewee.

Although his ministry initially focused on Italian inmates—many of whom had migrated to England during the 1970s and 1980s and lived in precarious, disoriented conditions—he gradually witnessed a profound transformation in the prison population. *"I saw faces, languages, and stories change. Men arrived alone, from different countries, with no family, no support, and often with deportation orders pending. They were looking for something to hold onto. Sometimes, what they asked for was simply to be heard".* Within this context, his pastoral outreach expanded to include migrants of many backgrounds — vulnerable individuals who often didn't speak English, had no resources, and were cut off from any community in the UK. His presence became a point of reference for those in need of human and spiritual contact.

Being close to people who had committed serious crimes did not drive him away. On the contrary, it compelled him to understand. *"I've seen everything. I never judged anyone. I always tried to understand the reasons behind their actions—what had led those young people—most of them very young—to commit such terrible, inhuman acts, which are humanly unforgivable. I tried to reach their hearts and to instil in them God's love, His mercy and forgiveness, even as they remained in prison".* Forgiveness, he affirms, is what makes a person free: "*It frees them from the slavery of sin, of crime, and restores their dignity. It helps them reconnect with their families, with society, with their own lives and stories—and only the Lord can do that".*

This, for him, is the mission of a chaplain: *"to go forth like the Good Shepherd who seeks the lost sheep; like the Good Samaritan who stops, sees, tends, and heals the wounds of so many, and brings them back to the Church".* And this is especially true in confession: "*the most powerful moment is when someone asks to confess. That's when all the bitterness comes out, the failure of life, the remorse that has shattered families — fathers and mothers, grandparents, society. Everything pours out: the chaos, the disaster, the filth. And yet, even there, a ray of light breaks in—the Lord enters and changes hearts. I have witnessed that love. Because only God can transform a person's heart. We cannot. We are only witnesses*".

Although now formally retired from his post, Father C. continues to visit the English prison. His presence remains a point of reference for many—especially those who, still deprived of freedom, seek a voice to listen to them, a word to guide them, a presence that does not forget them. His ministry has never been a function tied to an office: it is an evangelical act of faithfulness that endures over time.

EVALUATION OF THE GOOD PRACTICE ACCORDING TO THE MAIN PARAMETERS

POSITIVE IMPACT

Father C.'s long experience reveals a deep, though not always visible, impact on the incarcerated . *"There are people who have no intention of changing; life has hardened them; their hearts have turned bad".* Yet he has also accompanied many who, from their own fragility, seek to rebuild themselves. *"Jesus goes in search of the lost sheep, and when He finds it, He embraces it, He does not rebuke it".* In that gesture of unconditional welcome, the chaplain finds the true meaning of his mission.

SUSTAINABILITY

For Father C., the sustainability of this kind of ministry depends on how future priests are formed: *"they must be prepared for a new kind of mission".* He also trusts in the generosity of the communities when there is pastoral transparency*: "people get involved when they know where their money goes and when they feel they are part of a real community".*

INNOVATION

Father C. offers a pastoral vision that challenges with clarity: "*innovation* - he says - *lies not in methods but in the* ***coherence of the priest's life****. To be honest, to be clear, not to be false, not to live a double life".* For him, priestly ministry must go out to meet people: to visit families, be with children, go to hospitals, to the streets, to the poor and also *"to welcome migrants who are truly in need, because there are also many who take advantage of them".* He recognizes that the world has changed, that churches are emptying, that the sacraments are in decline, and he concludes without hesitation: *"it is we who must change. The clergy, the bishops, the priests. I speak with full knowledge of cause".*

EFFECTIVENESS

The effectiveness of his accompaniment is not measured in visible results, but in the way he approaches others. *"The first approach must always be very human, calm, serene, and dialogical".* His method is to

listen more than to speak: *"I only spoke a little; I always let them speak".* Often, these are long processes with no quick answers. *"Some are very hard, but one must be patient. It takes years and it is not easy".* He draws strength from Saint Paul's exhortation: *"weep with those who weep, suffer with those who suffer, rejoice with those who rejoice".*

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

Father C. insists that accompaniment does not end at the cell door. What keeps him going is witnessing people's transformation: *"seeing how, little by little, the Lord acts and people change...".* For him, the pastoral relationship continues even after release*: "I follow them outside as well."*

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

Although much of his ministry has been solitary, he never felt alone. *"There are many people who support my mission, who draw near through prayer; some even help with money".* In London, he organized prison visits with volunteers and fondly recalls the Christmas carol concerts performed by young musicians for the inmates: *"there is a whole world of volunteers around".*

REPLICABILITY

He is convinced that his experience can be replicated, as long as it is approached with openness and not legalism. *"Not being rigid, not being too much a guardian of the law, a legalist... a priest must find the persons in their need and try to understand them, to enter their soul".* He concludes with humility: *"if you don't enter the heart, everything is useless; only God can enter".*

IV. COMBATING TRAFFICKING AND PROMOTING WOMEN DIGNITY

GOD WANTS YOUR GOOD: SPIRITUAL LIBERATION FOR WOMEN VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING, MISSIONARY SISTERS OF OUR LADY OF AFRICA, FRANCE

Country and Place: Paris, France

Initiative: Spiritual Liberation for Victims of Trafficking

Beneficiaries: Young African Women

Theme: Protecting victims of human trafficking

Project Duration: 2014 to date

Funding Source: French Government

Website: https://www.msolafrica.org / https://www.captifs.fr

Catholic Organization: Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa

The goal of the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa and the Catholic Association "*Aux Captifs, la Libération*", founded by Father Patrick Giros, is to accompany young women between the ages of 14 and 30, originally from Africa, who are victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation. These women were controlled by a *"Madame",* due to an African ritual of submission performed before leaving their country. Threatened and forced into prostitution, they were saddled with unpayable debt and feared that their families could suffer serious harm or even death. In many cases, they later discovered that a close relative, often a brother, had sold them into the trafficking network.

In the Bois de Vincennes, on the Route de la Pyramid, a specially adapted van serves as the first point of contact for these young women. A medical team operates in a second vehicle, providing health care and follow-up care.

Throughout the accompaniment, the Congregation offers spiritual guidance focused on helping the women recover their identity. In the basement of a Catholic chapel across from the Moulin Rouge, they meet, cooked together, practice Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT), and receive emotional and spiritual support. *"They come freely; they know we aren't going to ask them for anything, no rituals, no commitments. Just to be together, eat together, talk, and sometimes cry",* Sister B.I. explains to us[17]. Although Sister B.I. is currently based in Spain, where she was transferred in mid-2023, she had worked directly in the Paris project prior to that date. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many activities were suspended, but the initiative has since resumed and continues. Now, Sister B.I. serves as Coordinator of the Commission against Trafficking in Madrid.

Many of these migrant women arrive with an image of God as a punishing figure, "*but over time they discover a different dimension. One of them told me: 'I thought God had abandoned me, but now I feel like He's been waiting for me here'".* The process began in the very place where they practiced prostitution. "*In that first year, the woman begins to believe in herself, that she is capable of leaving."* They learned small gestures of autonomy: regularly attending French classes on Thursdays, being punctual, preparing their own meals. Although they must give most of what they earned to the Madame, *"they save a little money for when they will leave, instead of spending it".* The first year is about building trust. None of them leave prostitution during that time. It is only in the second year that some begin to take the first steps toward a new life. "*When they come back, they tell me: 'Sister, I didn't go out today,' and they say it with a mixture of fear and pride".* The exit is slow and gradual.

Many women, most of whom identified as Christian but not Catholic, found hope in the figure of Saint Josephine Bakhita, who became a symbol of resilience and freedom.

17 All passages in quotation marks and italics correspond to the interviewee.

Once the decision is made, many continue working temporarily until they found employment—usually as hotel cleaners—and accommodation, often in a migrant shelter. *"Then they begin a job preparation program run by the Catholic association 'Aux Captifs, la Libération'".* The participation to the program is entirely voluntary. No religious practice is imposed; spirituality is offered as a possibility for inner healing. *"We asked them: what did you dream about when you were a child? Some don't remember, and then we begin to build their story together".*

There is also discreet institutional collaboration. *"There are police officers who know our work and call us when they found a girl on the street. Not always, but sometimes they do it".*

However, the context changed after the pandemic. Prostitution in Paris moved from the streets to private apartments, making direct outreach difficult and significantly reducing opportunities for contact.

EVALUATION OF THE GOOD PRACTICE ACCORDING TO THE MAIN PARAMETERS

POSITIVE IMPACT

"*The strategy brings about tangible transformation in women's lives by offering them a safe environment, medical care and the tools they need to regain their autonomy".* In other words, the women begin to believe that freedom is possible. In the medium term, they attend French courses, learn to manage their finances and regain confidence in their abilities. In the long term, they become able to integrate into urban life, find employment and regain their personal freedom.

SUSTAINABILITY

The French Abolitionist Law of 2016 recognized prostitution as a form of violence against women and sexual exploitation. In 2024, the European Court of Human Rights upheld this law, reinforcing its legal legitimacy. The association "Aux Captifs, la Libération" receives government funding to support African women in exiting trafficking. *"This funding lasted for two years and guaranteed access to housing, legal assistance for regularizing immigration status, and job placement support".* Howev-

er, the subsequent withdrawal of this funding by the French government significantly weakened the transition to autonomy, compromising the program's long-term sustainability. Despite this, *"the Catholic Congregation maintained its spiritual support, organizing prayer meetings and holiday celebrations without imposing religious practices".*

INNOVATION

The use of a van as a mobile point of first contact is an unprecedented approach in the French landscape, allowing access to female victims in vulnerable areas. This initial encounter is followed by medical care, psychological support, and the creation of a safe space in the basement of a chapel, where both human and spiritual bonds are nurtured. *"Integration is fostered through language acquisition, capacity building, and a rediscovery of faith. Many women reframed their image of God—from a punishing deity to one of love and compassion."*

EFFECTIVENESS

Over time, the model delivered concrete results: "*many women found stable employment, obtained residency permits, and left prostitution*". Some were able *"to rebuild healthy emotional relationships, regain trust in men, and even start new families".*

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

The project encouraged women's active involvement in their own journey toward liberation. *"They help design their individual integration plans, take autonomous decisions, and become protagonists in rebuilding their lives".*

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

The practice relied *"on a solid network of cooperation between religious institutions, civil society organizations, and public authorities, especially in the area of child protection*". This coordination enables quick and well-structured responses in critical situations.

REPLICABILITY

"The model is replicable but only under the same enabling conditions". Some women who successfully exited prostitution helped replicate the model in local initiatives, supported by new solidarity networks. However, the experiment has remained confined to France, as its implementation depends on the national legal framework—specifically, the 2016 French Abolitionist Law.

RENATE AND THE FIGHT AGAINST TRAFFICKING, INTERNATIONAL UNION OF SUPERIORS GENERAL (UISG), IRELAND

Country and Place: Ireland, Dublin (European Network)

Initiative: RENATE – Religious in Europe Networking Against Trafficking and Exploitation

Beneficiaries: Women victims of trafficking in Europe, vulnerable women, refugees, migrants

Theme: Fight against trafficking, spiritual guidance, defence of human rights, women's empowerment

Project duration: Since 2009 to date

Funding source: Religious congregations, private donations, international Catholic organizations

Website: https://www.renate-europe.net/

Catholic organization: UISG International Union of Superiors General

RENATE (*Religious in Europe Networking Against Trafficking and Exploitation*) is a Catholic network created by the UISG – International Union of Superiors General. RENATE counts 3,300 members across 31 European countries, comprising religious sisters and lay collaborators committed to the fight against human trafficking. Founded in 2009, it is co-chaired by a Superior General and a laywoman. While the headquarter is in Ireland, its impact extends throughout Europe.

The network is rooted "*in a deep spirituality that translates into concrete accompaniment, defence of human dignity, and active listening to the pain of victims",* says Sister M.P., President of RENATE and member of the Congregation of the Holy Family of Bordeaux[18]. She has devoted her life to accompanying women who are victims of violence and trafficking, both in South Africa and Europe. Her approach is based on embodied spirituality, *"a way of being with people, not rushing, respect-*

18 All passages in quotation marks and italics correspond to the interviewee.

ing their rhythm, their silence, their time". Her commitment springs from inner listening: *"sometimes just sitting silently beside them is already prayer. A strong spirituality is needed to understand and live this".*

RENATE does not limit its activity to denouncing the crime of trafficking. It addresses it from multiple perspectives: shelter, psychological support, legal assistance, prevention and, above all, spiritual accompaniment. As the RENATE President explains: "trafficking is the end of a process. Behind it, lie hunger, poverty, domestic violence, forced migration. There are no simple answers. That is why we need communities that listen, that accompany".

Collaboration among religious women from different congregations, cultures, and countries is at the heart of RENATE. The network supports them and strengthens them through training, spiritual retreats, and mutual accompaniment, which helps sustain their vocation in the face of deeply painful realities. "We hold spiritual encounters where we share what we live. We support one another. Because it is not easy. What we witness transforms us".

RENATE also engages with European institutions, NGOs, and civil society platforms, yet it maintains its identity as a faith-based network: "for us, the dignity of the person is not a theory; it is a spiritual experience. And it is from that root that we act".

Their testimony shows that true hope can emerge from even the deepest wounds, sustained by faith and action. They offer retreats because "we want people to understand how their spirituality truly affects their work, and how this work can be exhausting and frightening. A strong spirituality is needed to accompany this." She adds: "*every year, as a core group, we meet with a spiritual director to reflect on our spiritual direction, as well as how we are coping physically and psychologically*".

RENATE
Religious in Europe Networking
Against Trafficking and Exploitation

EVALUATION OF THE GOOD PRACTICE ACCORDING TO THE MAIN PARAMETERS

POSITIVE IMPACT

"The activities of the network really have a positive impact on the young victims. Sometimes it takes time. When people come to us, they may be drug addicts, completely traumatized. That's why it's important that we offer psychological, social, and spiritual support — but all this cannot be done in a week". RENATE has also a direct and tangible impact on the fight against trafficking in Europe. "*Through its decentralized structure, it has facilitated training, awareness-raising, and concrete support for thousands of victims".* It was created after the project *Talitha Kum*, which focuses primarily on Africa and Asia. "*RENATE began to fill this gap, so that we could see what was happening in Europe and provide help".*

SUSTAINABILITY

The network is funded by the Catholic Sisters Initiative of Conrad Hilton. *"Conrad Hilton recognized that if good works have done somewhere, it is usually religious women who do them. So, we use those funds to finance our work, but unfortunately, they have now been cut in half... But people continue to come to Europe. We will face serious challenges because people want to come here. With all the methods used to lure boys and girls, there is a huge system of deception — one of the key mechanisms of trafficking".*

INNOVATION

Innovation consists in being a virtual network. "*We are a network without a headquarter; so, we have people all over Europe doing all kinds of things: working directly with victims, offering shelter, providing education and prevention*". Even though they are a network that sustains thousands of participants, *"we don't have any office. But we have people across Europe who share the same goal and the same spirit. And I think that's our strength".* They also publish a newsletter that circulates throughout Europe.

EFFECTIVENESS

To ensure sound management, they use an external, qualified academic agency to evaluate management aspects yearly. This enables the network to clearly identify its strengths and areas for improvement.

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

RENATE's work is built from the ground up, with the direct involvement of those in contact with victims. Participation is high, and women's voices are central. *"Many women arrive voiceless, without identity. Accompanying them means helping them remember who they are — that their dignity has not been lost."*

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

"We collaborate with other groups that have the same goal as we do. There's no point in doing this alone. We need each other. And the wonderful thing is that there is no competition". Collaboration is horizontal, respectful, and effective. *"What unites us most is faith. Because everything else changes, but faith remains. And it allows us to look at suffering without despair".* The network also maintains a strong collaborative relationship with the UISG, from which it originated, and whose support enables it to amplify its advocacy work. It's not just about the desire to do something; it's about doing something together with many people, diverse people, with the same belief in God. *"We find it very energizing and valuable to be a network, because we operate on many levels. So, we are not limited by an organization telling us which path to follow. We choose to remain open — and that generates enormous richness for all involved".*

REPLICABILITY

The project is definitely open to being replicated: in fact, it has been replicated in 31 countries across Europe: *"we've just published a document on the RENATE shelters. There are five new shelters in five different countries. The last one is in Ukraine, where we extended awareness-raising, prevention and protection against human trafficking in war-ravaged".*

AGAINST HUMAN TRAFFICKING, MICAELA ONLUS ASSOCIATION, INSTITUTE OF THE ADORATRICES SISTERS, HANDMAIDS OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT AND OF CHARITY, ITALY

Country and Place: Italy, Bergamo, Bari and Taranto

Initiative: Micaela Onlus Association – Project of the Adoratrices Sisters

Beneficiaries: Women victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation, forced begging, or degrading labour

Theme: Spiritual accompaniment, comprehensive care, exit from prostitution context

Project duration: In Bergamo, since 1994 to date; in Bari, since 1999 to date; in Taranto, since 2010 to date.

Funding source: Italian State, support from private benefactors, civil associations, and structural donations

Website: https://adoratrici-italia.it/

Catholic Organization: Institute of the Adoratrices, Handmaids of the Blessed Sacrament and of Charity (Micaela Onlus Association)

The Religious Institute of the Adoratrices, Handmaids of the Blessed Sacrament and of Charity, founded in Spain in 1856 to serve young women in situations of prostitution, has established in Italy the Micaela Onlus Association, on September 14, 1999. Its founder, Micaela Desmaisieres - now Saint Mary Micaela of the Blessed Sacrament - was a pioneer in fighting gender-based violence and the sexual exploitation of young women in Madrid, as well as in defending women's human rights, based on spiritual accompaniment. This last feature has been described by Saint Micaela as "*the philosophy of intervention, the meaning of intervention, that come from the Eucharist, which is presence, nourishment, and care. And these are somewhat our preferred verbs when concretely translating that spirituality in our relationship with the women: presence, nourishment, and care*", says the Superior General, Sister P.S.[19].

19 All passages in quotation marks and italics correspond to the interviewee.

Micaela ONLUS has witnessed the evolution of trafficking in Italy: initially, the victims were girls from Eastern Europe; today they are mostly African women and Latin American transvestites. The victims hosted are increasingly younger, arrived in Italy for economic reasons - some already with prostitution experience in their countries of origin. They suffered a harsh treatment and lack of freedom: in particular, prostitution in apartments segregated them into a life without schedules and without freedom.

The project has a clear methodology based on presence, accompaniment, and community life. Women enter a process that lasts years and includes different phases: welcome, personal empowerment, training, and autonomy. Each one is supported in her own pace and decisions. "The work team is made up of Sisters, educators, and professionals in the field of social work, psychology and law".

This organization operates in Bergamo, Bari, and Taranto, with special attention to women victims of trafficking and severe sexual exploitation, labour, or begging.

The project in Bari began 25 years ago. "*There, we have a reception community, a street outreach team, a day centre and a listening centre. We support women engaged in street prostitution, as well as those confined in flats and unable to leave. All these services are aimed at women in prostitution and/or victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation*".

The sisters establish a human relationship with the girls, *"respectful, without pretensions, simply saying: 'I'm here because you are important to me'. Then, after we meet, you are free to decide"*. What they ask from the street unit is medical or legal help. *"Normally in this environment, they do not ask for help to leave clandestinity"*. This is the first mode of closeness with women victims of trafficking. *"When someone wants to leave or change her way of living, she asks for more consistent, concrete help. We have a residential shelter community"*. There, they follow a concrete learning project, starting from the first rules of community living, of healthy relationships, and they are prepared to train for a different kind of work. Later, once they have a minimum of competence and autonomy, *"we arrange for an external work opportunity through paid internships or job placements, which sometimes results in employment"*. Some of them request a job, *"they ask to leave clandestinity, they don't want to go into the community, and we help*

them according to what they ask." Two years ago, they opened a *"Day Centre"* on Bari's seafront. *"It's a street prostitution zone. We were given a facility that had been confiscated from the mafia to use it along with two partner associations of our Bari Community".* So, the girls who haven't left prostitution have a place to rest, *"to talk to someone, to be listened to - it's a space for them".*

Another way of helping these girls is to take care of them within the territory. These are women who have left prostitution and are trying to rebuild their lives. They need support to send their children to nursery, to find work or if they are unwell. These women are supported even if they are not hosted in the community. In Taranto, "*we go with the street unit during the day. We offer listening and assistance for whatever these young prostitutes on the streets ask for (health care, legal assistance, etc.)"*.

Also, the recent COVID pandemia generated another modality of supporting these women: the prostitution in apartments, the so-called "indoor prostitution", is very exhausting, it creates more and more difficulties, because there is no day or night for these women, and it is very difficult to establish a dialogue. *"It also has personal consequences for the women, such as disorientation and confusion about time. This can lead to a strong psychological imbalance, which hinders the educational relationship and the support we try to provide".*

As religious sisters, they have the task of animating the little community, *"giving soul, transmitting what we've learned from Micaela, which we call the pedagogy of love. Micaela began by helping prostitutes in Madrid around 1850, when this way of life was considered almost a crime, a stigma, a social mark, and she tells us very clearly: no punishments, no reformatories—they are persons, and it will be love that helps us accompany them to a different life".*

The Good Practice of the Adoratrices of the Blessed Sacrament, through the Micaela Onlus Association, "shows that it is possible to accompany women who have been victims of trafficking with respect, dignity, and the pedagogy of love".

EVALUATION OF THE GOOD PRACTICE ACCORDING TO THE MAIN PARAMETERS

POSITIVE IMPACT

The spiritual and human accompaniment allows many women to gradually recognize themselves as subjects of rights. "The women speak of their experience as a true rebirth. They arrive destroyed, ill, fragile, and throughout this experience, they regain strength and serenity. There are stories of deep pain, but also of great transformation: regaining contact with their families of origin, reuniting with their children, completing a training course, becoming economically independent, or simply smiling and building community bonds with others". For the sisters, "it is also a spiritual and vital experience of high intensity and significance".

SUSTAINABILITY

The model has been consolidated over the years. The presence of sisters and laypeople is supported by the Association Micaela Onlus, and relies on the support of volunteers, social networks, and public co-financing. The sustainability of the project depends largely on "the institutional commitment and support of the Congregation and the ability to remain attentive to emerging phenomena, such as indoor prostitution or new recruitment strategies".

INNOVATION

Significant changes were made in the organisation of daily life through discussion and dialogue with the host girls. "Until recently, it was unthinkable that the girls would be left alone at night. Today, however, they take responsibility and are left alone at night, leaving the community on Saturday and returning on Sunday evening". The project's innovation lies in the fact that there is no dedicated catechesis space: "we do not follow a catechetical path; we are very clear that our life must be a catechesis and that the Word of God speaks to everyone. Therefore, in all moments of life, even those of suffering, we offer them the words and thoughts of Jesus. Our life is catechesis; it is proclaiming the Word of Jesus that these women can understand our religion".

EFFECTIVENESS

The activity achieves its aims. "*Our project has a very clear and defined structure, with clear objectives and practices, we don't do things improvised. Our main goal is that the girls get to know themselves, accept themselves, bring out the best in themselves and find a different way of living. Of course, the goals are not one hundred per cent achieved, partly because each girl has a different, very painful personal history. This is an effective project, which works in a very high percentage of situations, whether in Bergamo, Bari, or Taranto. And for this we are very satisfied*".

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

The project works on the principle of shared responsibility: "the women are accompanied and listened to, but are also encouraged to express their needs, participate in daily life, and help other women who arrive later. The involvement of women in activities, training, and decision-making is an integral part of the project".

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

The Micaela Onlus Association works in collaboration with several institutions, associations, and services: "in Bari, for example, we are part of the "Puglia non Tratta" project, where we collaborate with other partners in the region, and in the case of the Day Centre on the Bari seafront, the locations were confiscated from the mafia and are managed in co-responsibility with other civil society associations". The reception community is in a house owned by the diocese and the listening centre is in the diocesan Caritas headquarters. The relationship with institutions is based on trust and continuity.

REPLICABILITY

The model of the Micaela Onlus has been replicated over time in different Italian cities. It was born in the north, in Bergamo, and five years later was replicated in Bari, then extended to Taranto. In the past, similar experiences were developed in Sicily, in Agrigento, Ramacca, and Caltanissetta. Recently, at the latest UISG assembly, a community on the border with Texas (USA) was mentioned. "The model is adaptable to other contexts, provided that there is a deep rooting in the territory and in the local network".

LA CASITA PROJECT AND DANIELA PROJECT, CONGREGATION OF THE SISTERS OBLATES OF THE MOST HOLY REDEEMER, SPAIN

Country and Place: Spain, Canary Islands

Initiative: Project "La Casita y Daniela in the Canary Islands"

Beneficiaries: Trafficking victims, women in contexts of prostitution, or migrant women in situations of social vulnerability, mainly from Africa, Latin America, and Eastern Europe.

Theme: Spiritual accompaniment, comprehensive care, personal empowerment, and social awareness.

Duration: Since 2000 to date

Funding: Congregation's own funds, local institutional support, and collaboration within networks of solidarity

Website: https://hermanasoblatas.org

Catholic organization: Congregation of the Sisters Oblates of the Most Holy Redeemer

The two projects in the Canary Islands - "La Casita" and "Daniela" - are tangible expressions of the Congregation of the Sisters Oblates charism in action. To accompany, welcome, empower, and transform are the keys to a social practice that is incarnated, committed, and deeply human—faithful to the Good News of the Gospel and to every woman's right to a dignified life. The two projects have the same director, Sister A., a sister of the Congregation of the Sisters Oblates of the Most Holy Redeemer, founded in the 19th century in Madrid by Antonia María de Oviedo and José María Benito Serra.

The congregation has maintained an active presence in the Canary Islands for more than two decades. "Its institutional charism is manifested in the option: accompaniment, welcome, empowerment, and transformation are the foundations. These are offered to women in contexts of social vulnerability, generating spaces of welcome and dignified life alternatives, from a Gospel and human rights perspective," says Sister A.[20]

20 The passages in quotation marks and italics are excerpts from the interviewee.

The commitment is to be present to welcome, to accompany, to offer life alternatives, to seek this out as a harsh reality that women who are victims of trafficking live, through the context of prostitution or through the social, personal situations that they live in. Give a ray of hope to the woman's reality: this is the charism of the Congregation. The sisters, together with other workers, go to where the migrants disembark and try to identify girls who seem to be looking for someone and who, therefore, they believe are part of a trafficking network. After a moment of welcoming and getting to know each other, the sisters leave their contact details and make themselves available to welcome them into their home. Some of them go immediately, while others reach the sisters' house after some time. "*We have to keep them hidden because the traffickers are looking for them to kidnap them. And we always have to be on our guard, also because here we are on an island*".

In addition to this work, the sisters carry out parallel activities with the island's inhabitants, as not everyone agrees with their work. "*We must encourage the island's society to be more welcoming, based on the unconditional love of Jesus. We have to break down prejudices against immigrants - above all those against migrants coming from Central Africa and Latin America – and we have to be more inclusive*".

In the Canary Islands, women come from countries affected by war and violence, including Latin America, Africa, and some parts of the East. *"But the mafias have all the means and adequate structures for the movement of women".* The work in the islands adapts to the complexity of the migratory, social, and economic context. The women assisted *"come from contexts marked by war, poverty, gender-based violence, and exploitation networks. We observe a diversification in forms of prostitution, often exercised in closed spaces or through digital device, which makes access and direct intervention more difficult".*

According to Sister A., their lines of action are five: 1. *Integral Accompaniment*; 2. *Intervention on the territory*; 3. *Inclusive spirituality*; 4. *Networking;* 5. *Awareness-raising and social transformation.*

Integral Accompaniment focuses on the different dimensions of a woman's life: emotional, social, legal, educational, work and spiritual, and it is based on a relationship based on trust, respect and active listening. Personalised itineraries are created that consider individual times, special needs and available resources. This process aims to

foster empowerment, autonomy and the construction of a life project that the woman feels is her own.

The *Intervention on the territory* provides that the team of professionals regularly goes to areas where prostitution is practised, both on public streets and in private spaces such as flats, to get closer to the reality of women, establish contact, offer a listening ear and propose resources. "*This street methodology allows us to have an up-to-date view of the contexts, facilitates access to the most invisible women and helps to identify cases of trafficking and sexual exploitation. The intervention adapts to changes in the practice of prostitution, in particular the relocation to enclosed spaces or the use of digital platforms*". The project is part of a wide network of cooperation with social, health, educational, police and religious bodies, both local and European. This network makes it possible to make appropriate referrals, to provide specialised assistance in different fields (legal, mental health, vocational training, etc.) and to strengthen shared social action. In addition, it is part of the European network of Oblate projects, which enables special cases requiring transfer or assistance to other geographical areas.

The *Inclusive spirituality* assumes that spirituality is not imposed, but it is offered as an experience open to encounter and meaning in life. It is based on the evangelical values of welcome, mercy, justice and hope, but deeply respects the diversity of beliefs. Interfaith dialogue is promoted by the conviction that spirituality can be a source of meaning, personal reconstruction and life-giving grounding. Women who are Muslim, Christian, of other faiths or without religious affiliation find spaces where their experience of the transcendent is welcomed and accompanied.

Awareness-raising and social transformation are also important pillars of the project. "*We are aware that social intervention cannot be limited to the field of assistance. For this reason, we promote social awareness-raising actions through workshops, conferences, collaborations with the media and participation in platforms that promote the defence of human rights*".

The aim of these lines of action is to raise social awareness, combat stereotypes, denounce structural violence and promote a culture of respect, inclusion and gender equality.

EVALUATION OF THE GOOD PRACTICE ACCORDING TO THE MAIN PARAMETERS

POSITIVE IMPACT

The project has transformed the lives of many women, *"not only at a personal level but also at a community level. A change is observed in their self-perception, in their ability to make decisions, in the restoration of their rights, and in the building of new support networks".* Furthermore, the networking work strengthens institutional impact and contributes to the transformation of the social environment.

SUSTAINABILITY

The economic and human sustainability of the project is a constant challenge, due to the complexity of the interventions and the need for specialized resources. *"The Congregation guarantees a firm institutional commitment, but the need to diversify funding sources and consolidate strategic alliances with public and private entities that share the mission is acknowledged".*

INNOVATION

The projects "La Casita" and "Daniela" stands out for their *"ability to adapt to changes in the context of prostitution and trafficking".* In response to the increase in sex work taking place in private spaces and through digital platforms, *"it has developed a flexible and community-based territorial intervention".* The creation of the Day Centre, in collaboration with local entities, *"offers a safe space for women still engaged in prostitution, prioritizing active listening and gradual accompaniment".* Its inclusive spiritual approach and coordination within a European network of Oblate projects and allied institutions *"reinforce its innovative and transformative response".*

EFFECTIVENESS

The effectiveness of the project is not measured exclusively by quantitative results, *"but by the processes sustained over time. Accompanying a woman in her process of empowerment and autonomy is a complex task that requires flexibility, patience, and adaptability".* Every step is valued as an achievement, and the bond created is considered a key indicator of success.

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

The women not only receive care but also actively participate in the design and development "*of activities, of training spaces, and of community actions. Their voices are heard, their contributions valued, and their participation as active citizens and agents of transformation is promoted".*

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

Despite a sometimes adverse social and political context, *"the project has succeeded in weaving meaningful alliances. There are challenges posed by discourses that stigmatize women, but persistent work is carried out to build collaborative spaces based on mutual respect and a shared commitment to social justice".*

REPLICABILITY

The Oblates' model of social action, centred on reception, accompaniment, and the empowerment of women, *"is replicable in other contexts. Its value lies in the integral approach, its adaptability to different realities, and its foundation in human and Gospel values".*

MARY WARD LORETO NETWORK, MARY WARD LORETO FOUNDATION, CONGREGATION OF JESUS, ALBANIA AND UNITED KINGDOM

Countries: Albania and the United Kingdom

Initiative: Prevention, spiritual accompaniment, protection, and empowerment against human trafficking

Beneficiaries: 1.630 migrants served in total (adults, minors, asylum seekers)

Theme: Human trafficking, spiritual and economic empowerment, accompaniment of migrants and refugees

Project duration: Since 2013 to date

Funding source: MWL UK fundraising, the Congregation's own funds, support from the Albanian government, international networks (Australia, USA, Ireland)

Website: https://www.albaniahope.com

Catholic organization: Mary Ward Loreto Foundation / Congregation of Jesus

There are transformative women who, across generations, inspire others to walk difficult paths in the hope of fostering a profound change in the essence of people — helping each person to recognise their value, in fulfilment of the Creator's will. One such woman was Mary Ward, an English Catholic from Yorkshire, born in 1585 and died in 1645. She believed firmly in the nature of the human being, in its potential, and in its profound dignity. In an unthinkable time, she offered education to girls so that they could fully develop their God-given potential. Her Congregation has since taken unusual and daring paths. One of them is the fight against trafficking, particularly among vulnerable populations such as migrants. The goal is not only to eradicate this evil, but to accompany each person in rediscovering their value — empowering them spiritually, personally, and economically.

Mary Ward's vision has crossed borders and created global networks that unite spirituality with action. Guided by the values of Freedom,

Justice, Truth, and Joy, the Congregation, 20 years ago, included in its mission to bring an end to human trafficking — a modern form of slavery. This vision has been realised through the work of the IBVM in Albania, where an NGO called Mary Ward Loreto was founded 12 years ago. This NGO works closely with its counterpart in England who helps sustain financially the Foundation in Albania. Mary Ward Loreto Albania is built on three pillars: Protect Programme, consisting in six MWL Advice and Service Centres (ASC) around Albania (direct response serving victims and survivors through comprehensive life-changing services, listening to victims, offering shelter, psychological support, and rehabilitation); Empower Programme, namely a justice and equity driven movement centred around human rights for youth and women, providing the tools —economic and social— that allow each person to choose and sustain a new, dignified life; and Prevent Programme, turning knowledge into strategies for policy action to disrupt and prevent human trafficking and modern slavery.

In Albania there is Sister I.P.[21], the only IBVM Sister on mission there. Her initial companion has since died, back in England, some years ago. "*Presently I am working in close collaboration with passionate young professional Albanians to forward this mission of Mary Ward. The call made to IBVM by the then Archbishop of Tirana, 20 years ago, to protect young Albanian women who were taken by speedboats from Albania to Italy for prostitution —and then returned, deeply traumatised, pregnant, or gravely ill — was decisive*". The congregation and co-workers accompanied them through their healing process, addressing not only their physical and psychological wounds but also oppressive family structures, such as arranged marriages and patriarchal fear. Alongside psychologists, they visit homes and gather profoundly painful testimonies. "*Many of these women managed to rebuild themselves, overcome limitations, achieve economic and emotional autonomy, and were recognised by their own communities. This entire journey gave rise to a small booklet that captures their testimonies, flowing through the principles of Mary Ward. These are women who have grown in dignity and self-respect, becoming the person God had in mind when they were conceived*". This is the theological and philosophical foundation of the congregation, which has led to the creation of wide-reaching networks that fight against human trafficking across several countries. The spiritual dimension is clear: evil exists. And in these crimes, free

21 All passages in quotation marks and italics correspond to the interviewee.

will becomes a choice between the God of love who dwells within us all, and the god of greed, pride, and jealousy — which hardens the heart, even of those who sell their own children.

This project also includes the empowerment of Afghan and Filipino asylum seekers, with over 900 individuals reached through Service and Advice Centres for identification, protection, and reintegration. Vocational training, psychological and legal support, civic education, and youth leadership clubs are all offered within a framework of community transformation. IBVM also co-created URAT Albania, a national anti-trafficking network[22].

EVALUATION OF THE GOOD PRACTICE ACCORDING TO THE MAIN PARAMETERS

POSITIVE IMPACT

In 2023 a total of 1,630 people has benefited from the programme: 1,024 adults, 606 minors, and 291 Afghans. A total of 1,751 services has been delivered, of which 977 were directly provided by the Mary Ward Loreto Foundation, and 441 with the support of partner organisations. All victims receive immediate protection services, and trust is slowly built within their communities to enable the next step. Many of the victims are minors. "*After a year of treatment, if they feel strong enough, they often wish to return to school. If they choose to pursue university education, they are supported and socially empowered. They enter the 'Empowerful programme', where each person is encouraged to shine in their uniqueness*". The programmes are run by survivors themselves, fostering mutual trust and care — creating a true circle of mutuality. "*Professionals who are the employed team working with the congregation also receive ongoing capacity building. To sustain this impact, further funding is essential to save thousands of young people*". Over the course of twelve years, MWL has earned deep respect and achieved tangible results.

22 https://www.talithakum.info/en/members/221/urat-albania/

SUSTAINABILITY

To meet the financial needs, a legal entity under the UK Charities Commission named Mary Ward Loreto UK, has been established — effectively functioning as two foundations working in unison. MWL Albania also offers psychotherapy services to the Medaille Trust in the UK, with the goal of offering psychological services online to Albanians rescued in the UK who suffer from post-traumatic stress. Additionally, the Albanian government provides support for food and shelter for victims of trafficking living in shelters, as well as covering staff salaries in the shelters. Plans are underway to open an International Centre for the Foreign Nationals trafficked in Albania. A project regarding Filipinos women is currently supported by MWL International Australia, with the hope of future collaboration with Australia and other internationally funded bodies.

INNOVATION

"*Empowerful*" is MWL's most significant collaborative innovation. "*It brings survivors to the front line, trains them in leadership, and enables them to take control of their lives — even peer to peer training of one another.* The project with Filipino women is also innovative, and the approach is multifaceted: "*it includes a dedicated research component and a strong advocacy strategy, with the aim of bringing about legislative changes and societal transformations both locally and globally*". The next innovation will be the International Centre, grounded in research conducted within communities. A guide for the Filipino and wider Asian communities is in progress, to aid in prevention and advocacy, offering safety guidance from the decision to migrate until arrival and afterwards, when some become trapped by trafficking gangs in Albania. This resource will help avoid false job offers and it is hoped will be in action by the end of 2025.

EFFECTIVENESS

"Deeply moving rescue stories have been shared, marked by the maturity, poise, and professionalism of the survivors. Many of them now give back to the younger generations with gratitude". Everyone is supported according to their personal potential and encouraged to shine. *"Numerous cases demonstrate that people have been able to leave behind lives of immense suffering".*

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

"MWL is structured around a non-hierarchical model". Its goal is to develop a horizontal approach in which everyone is heard and actively participates. *"Human trafficking is addressed by listening and spiritual accompaniment, not only at the local level, but also at the global and national levels, to understand trafficking trends".* Everyone contributes, and as a result, the foundation is strengthened. *"The more you try to involve a person, the more she feels accepted and part of the community".*

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

MWL thrives on dynamic peer-to-peer collaboration. *"Many people are drawn to the foundation because of its inspiring methodologies. Cooperation with workers, both statutory and non-statutory, is essential".* MWL closely collaborate with government institutions, *"providing access to legislation and best practices, offering spiritual accompaniment, and promoting systemic change driven by faith and compassion".* Its international activity is ongoing, especially vital in the face of rising trafficking. Many people voluntarily dedicate their lives to this cause.

REPLICABILITY

MWL provides guidance for those wishing to replicate its model. *"It should certainly be replicated in every border situation; it becomes a way of saying: 'I've endured tragedy, but here I am welcomed by God'".* It offers its methodology to those committed to implementing similar actions.

V. PUBLIC WITNESS AND EMBODIED SPIRITUALITY

COMPASSION IN TIMES OF WAR, UKRAINIAN GREEK-CATHOLIC CHURCH, UKRAINE

Country and Place: Ukraine, Lviv and surrounding regions

Initiative: Spiritual support and psychological training at the Greek-Catholic Seminary of Lviv

Beneficiaries: Migrants, displaced persons, widows, soldiers, orphans, seminarians

Theme: Pastoral presence, spiritual accompaniment, grief support, war resilience

Project Duration: Since 2014 to date (intensified from 2022 to present)

Funding Source: Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, international donations

Website: https://gcatholic.org/churches/europe-east/46263

Catholic Organization: Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church

The war unleashed by Russia against Ukraine has changed the everyday life of Ukrainian people. In this context of national trauma, the Greek-Catholic Seminary of Lviv sensed the gravity of the situation and initiated a profound program of spiritual accompaniment. It is a practice not limited to theological education but is intended to provide insight into the real and raw experiences of war, such as grief, fear, trauma and hopelessness. The Rector of the Seminary describes it not as a response, but as a foresight: forming future priests capable of standing beside the broken, with words when needed, and silence when that is all that remains. Over 800 seminarians have undergone this path in recent years, with a program that touches upon war psychology, trauma-informed accompaniment, and spiritual endurance.

"Migrant displaced people become strangers in their own land," notes father I.B., Rector of the Greek Catholic Seminary in Lviv[23]. So, the seminarians visit and accompany the displaced people by meeting their primary needs—food, hygiene, a safe space to rest and pray—and by providing pastoral presence. They pray for peace, listen to the anguish of those forced to flee, and offer spiritual reflection on the questions that war inevitably provokes: why war? where is God? will it ever end? The Seminary also organizes mutual support groups for those who have lost loved ones. These are spaces of healing through collective grief. Liturgies and shared memories become acts of resistance against forgetting. The seminarians and priests do not impose faith but make room for mourning and spiritual rupture. They visit cemeteries weekly to be near those who sit beside the graves of fallen soldiers. *"Being present among the grieving prevents suicide,"* the Rector explains.

A second front is in orphanages and hospitals. There, seminarians accompany children who have lost their families, and soldiers whose bodies and spirits bear the marks of war. Their presence is a quiet resistance to the isolation that trauma provokes. With each liturgy, with each silent prayer, the seminarians help anchor shattered lives in a horizon of hope.

In addition, the Rector describes a third front of their mission: humanitarian visits to villages near active conflict zones: Kharkiv, Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, and Odessa. These are places without water, gas, electricity, or internet. The missions are always surrounded by prayer, and seminarians travel across Ukraine with volunteers to bring food, medicine, and listening. *"We are companions on the journey",* the Rector says, *"and even when we can't change reality, we witness it together".*

23 All passages in quotation marks and italics correspond to the interviewee.

EVALUATION OF THE GOOD PRACTICE ACCORDING TO THE MAIN PARAMETERS

POSITIVE IMPACT

The education of over 800 seminarians *"has produced a new generation of priests capable of providing spiritual and emotional support in times of war".* Their accompaniment reduces *"despair, prevents suicides among the grieving, and offers spaces for collective mourning. It brings meaning where loss threatens to engulf the spirit".*

SUSTAINABILITY

The seminary and its activities are fully supported by the Greek-Catholic Church and the Ukrainian diaspora. "*Donations fund basic needs, while the seminarians themselves are strengthened emotionally and theologically to withstand the trauma they witness. Their education is both pastoral and psychological*".

INNOVATION

The training program incorporates "*trauma-informed pastoral care and contextual theology rooted in war realities*". This includes "*working with psychologists and using spiritual tools—liturgies, silence, storytelling—as ways to process grief*". Weekly gatherings *"with displaced people, with widows, for instance, allow spaces for spiritual dialogue with those who feel betrayed by God".*

EFFECTIVENESS

Displaced families actively seek out accompaniment, demonstrating the credibility and depth of this mission. Spiritual support helps mourners endure their grief and allows seminarians to embody the Church's compassionate presence in a wounded nation.

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

Rather than imposing pre-designed programs, *"the Seminary's approach arises from listening and shared experience. Seminarians adapt their presence to the varied responses of pain—silence, tears, questions, or anger. This flexibility honours the uniqueness of each person's trauma".*

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

The Seminary collaborates "*with military chaplains, psychologists, dioceses, and international partners. Volunteers from peace networks often accompany missions to border villages*". The Church remains independent *"but engaged, open to aid without losing its identity and its mission".*

REPLICABILITY

This model of spiritual accompaniment *"amidst war can be adapted to any humanitarian crisis. Its strength lies in its humility and theological depth: to console without fixing, to serve without preaching, and to walk with the broken as an act of shared resistance. It is not only a response to war and its consequences, but also an education in mercy for a fractured world".*

WELCOMING AS A VOCATION, COMMUNITY OF SANT'EGIDIO, ITALY

Country and place: Italy, Rome and countries in different continents

Initiative: Community of Sant'Egidio – Lay movement for social and spiritual action

Beneficiaries: Migrants, refugees, aged people, people in situations of poverty or vulnerability

Themes: Spiritual accompaniment, welcome, social integration, humanitarian corridors, interfaith coexistence

Project duration: Since 1968 to date

Funding source: Private donations, community networks, self-financing

Website: https://www.santegidio.org

Catholic organization: Community of Sant'Egidio

The Community of Sant'Egidio was founded in 1968 in Rome, driven by a small group of young students led by Andrea Riccardi, deeply moved by the spirit of the Second Vatican Council. Amidst a strong cultural and social ferment, Riccardi sensed that the world needed to change, and that this change entailed transforming the human person through the Gospel. Thus began a constant reading of the Gospel and the Bible, which led him, along with other young people, to discover the world of the poor on the Roman outskirts, in slums and shacks inhabited by internally displaced Italian immigrants and workers in precarious situations. Since then, the community's core focus has been a personal encounter with the poor, sustained by prayer and fraternal life. Over the years, the community has grown, becoming *"a movement recognized by the Church and has spread to many countries around the world, in Europe, Africa, Latin America, North America, and Asia,"* explains the representative of Sant'Egidio, M.Q.[24] The Community has grown significantly, *"spreading to more than 70 countries and developing multiple forms of assistance based on local needs: vulnerable children, elderly, disabled, migrants, and refugees".*

24 All passages in quotation marks and italics correspond to the interviewee.

The initiative with foreign migrants *"began in the 1980s in Rome, when the first migratory flows appeared, primarily women from Cape Verde who worked as domestic workers"*. Since then, one of their main activities has been teaching the language of the host country, with an approach tailored to working adults. This experience grew in scale, developing its own teaching methods, teaching materials, and more than 5.000 students in Rome alone. With each new Sant'Egidio community in Europe, *"one of the first things we do is teach the country's languages, because we believe that learning languages is the key to entering a society"*.

In parallel, the Friendship Houses were born, meeting places where people listen, are guided, and assisted with procedures, basic needs, food, clothing, and legal or social advice. In 2015, following the Lampedusa tragedy, one of the most emblematic projects was born: humanitarian corridors, a legal and safe route of entry for refugees. *"We initiated the first protocol for Syrians present in Lebanon"*, later they extended to Ethiopia, Libya, Iran, and Pakistan. Through agreements with governments and support from communities, families, parishes, and religious groups, more than 9.000 people have been welcomed and integrated in dignified conditions. *"The example of humanitarian corridors has been followed by France, Belgium, the Republic of Andorra, and the Republic of San Marino"*.

"We practice spiritual accompaniment essentially through friendship and personal relation. Then there are many ways: participation in choirs, participation in prayer, participation in Bible meetings, participation in the liturgy. Sometimes, liturgies are dedicated to certain countries if there are particular moments of suffering, such as, for Latin Americans, the memory of Archbishop Romero or certain specific holidays". And he continues: *"It's not just the joint liturgy, but also having a space to celebrate together, for example, Christmas and Easter. And this is a concern we have with everyone, with Christians, clearly in a more articulate way, but also with Muslims"*. For example, he notes: *"if there is a mourning, as has happened, for example, with young Muslims living in our homes and losing a family member, we organize a moment of remembrance: they pray, we are present, and then we eat together. There is respect and a communal closeness"*.

The Community operates voluntarily, without employees, organizing its activities according to the availability of each member. Many migrants who are hosted later become active volunteers. In all cases, the key is the personal relationship and continuity.

EVALUATION OF THE GOOD PRACTICE ACCORDING TO THE MAIN PARAMETERS

POSITIVE IMPACT

The impact of their activities is rated as very positive. The Community action has strengthened social coexistence and integration between people of different religions and cultures. *"We believe that people from different countries and different religions can live together, and we believe that Europe should start building a model of coexistence"*. It has created a network of relationships that defuses social tensions and offers a new model of coexistence for Europe.

SUSTAINABILITY

Despite cuts at the European level, such as food aid, the project continues thanks to voluntary commitment and local campaigns: "*Young people and adults from the Community have committed to doing even more food drives, for example, in front of supermarkets"*. It adapts to new challenges without compromising continuity.

INNOVATION

The most significant innovations of their project are the creation of humanitarian corridors, specific language learning methodologies for adult workers, and the restructuring of Friendship Houses as centres for social rights services. "*We also have expanded the employment support section, for both Italians and foreigners"*.

EFFECTIVENESS

The effectiveness of the Community action is rated as very high. *"We are very satisfied, for example, with the language school, the Friendship House, and the humanitarian corridors"*. The Community observes clear outcomes such as migrants' autonomy, employment insertion, and the creation of stable ties with local society.

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

Based on continuous dialogue, the new needs are always identified by listening the people involved. For instance, with refugees arriving from Libya, *"we made greater efforts with them in terms of healthcare"*.

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

Sant'Egidio has strong collaboration with public institutions, international organizations (such as UNHCR), religious organizations (Caritas, Evangelical churches), and various NGOs. Pope Francis "*has been very close to Sant'Egidio and the humanitarian corridors; on several occasions, he encouraged parishes and churches to host refugees*".

REPLICABILITY

The experience of humanitarian corridors has been replicated by other countries. "*We would like European governments to increase the number of regular entries precisely to combat irregular entries through traffickers, which are dangerous*". The Community promotes its expansion as a safe and regulated alternative to irregular migration.

SUFFERING WITH – JRS IN MIGRANT DETENTION CENTRES, JESUIT REFUGEE SERVICE, BELGIUM

Country and Place: Belgium, Brussels

Initiative: Spiritual accompaniment and Ignatian presence in migrant detention centers

Beneficiaries: Migrants in an irregular administrative situation detained in closed centers, both men and women

Theme: Migration, detention, Ignatian spirituality, consolation, presence

Project duration: Since 2001 to date

Funding source: Society of Jesus, private donations, temporary funding for specific projects

Website: www.jrsbelgium.org

Catholic organization: Jesuit Refugee Service – JRS Belgium

The Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) in Belgium carries out a silent yet deeply committed mission inside the country's six administrative migrant detention centers, including one exclusively for women. The purpose of their presence is not to provide legal assistance or external material aid. It is something deeper: to be there, to accompany, to bear witness. *"We are not chaplains. We are not part of the system. We don't have keys. We don't want to have them. Because if you have the key, you are part of the system that detains",* says Father P.P.L., JRS spiritual accompanier in Brussels detention centres[25].

This mission is not measured by results, but by the fidelity of presence. *"We visit once a week. We are a presence that does not dominate. We are not there to physically liberate, but to be at one's side".* The JRS team does not organize religious services unless requested. Accom-

25 All passages in quotation marks and italics correspond to the interview with Father P.P.L., SJ, a Flemish Jesuit, who offers spiritual accompaniment and leads Spiritual Exercises inside Belgium's migrant detention centers.

paniment *"is spiritual in the Ignatian sense: a humble presence, a deep listening."* Although they do not always speak of God, *"we are always alongside God's suffering. That, for me as a Jesuit, is spirituality".*

Migrants in detention experience a wide range of suffering: *"Many suffer the 'without': without a network, without comfort, without God. Some suffer 'against': against the system, against others, even against themselves. But when they begin to suffer 'with' someone, something changes. It becomes bearable. A new internal movement begins".* The JRS mission is grounded in Ignatian consolation, understood not as superficial comfort, but as inner freedom: *"a profound peace, even when nothing changes externally. The pain doesn't disappear. But you are no longer alone".*

Listening is central, *"Listening is already intervening. Being present with your body and with attention is already transformative".* The team is composed of Jesuits, religious sisters, laypeople, young people in education, and legal and human rights professionals. They work in a noisy environment, with no privacy, constant interruptions, and under surveillance: *"there are cameras, there is noise, there are doors opening and closing. Sometimes you can't even hear the detainee. But they see you. And you are there".* Even so, detainees often tell them: *"we were waiting for you. Where were you last week?".*

Ignatian spirituality guides every action *"We don't try to fix or convert. We let the Creator act in the creature. We are only there to help that relationship occur". "Some volunteers get frustrated because they want to save. But we don't save. We accompany".* Even if the fruits are not always visible, their meaning remains: *"the fruit is not always visible. But you have been there. And they know it. And God knows it. That is our practical theology." "We've been accused of being 'against Belgium' because of our presence in the detention centers. But we are not against anyone. We are with those who have no one".* In the face of that external judgment, their response remains unwavering: *"It's Matthew 25: 'I was in prison, and you visited me'. That's enough. That says it all".*

EVALUATION OF THE GOOD PRACTICE ACCORDING TO THE MAIN PARAMETERS

POSITIVE IMPACT

When visits are made, the prisoners, most of them are Muslims, begin to question the reasons for their detention, but later emerge interrogatives about the deep sense of their migration and their lives. *"At first, they are very withdrawn and uncommunicative. They think that since I'm a priest, I can help them get out. After a few weeks or months, deeper questions begin to emerge, and a relationship starts to build. You become someone who accompanies them. And by the time that relationship is built, they've often already been transferred. But then, from another country, they call. That's very positive to me".*

SUSTAINABILITY

This Jesuit Refugee Service in Belgium is supported by the Society of Jesus. The Jesuits pay half of the costs, mainly the salaries of collaborators, who are not all Jesuits; there are also lay people. *"The other half comes from donations. People are very generous with the Jesuit Refugee Service; we receive many donations. For certain projects, we also receive external grants. We have to seek funding for temporary projects lasting two, three, or four years. But the basic project is always the same: visiting migrant detention centres".*

INNOVATION

The project is basically the same from the beginning: visiting detention centres. *"But we've also started new temporary projects related to this basic activity. Because we're not in favour of detention centres, but you can't simply be against them: we have to offer an alternative. So, for some years now, we've also been exploring alternatives to detention. This initiative is relatively new".* They also engage in outreach: *"we have increasing contact with schools, especially Jesuit schools, to raise awareness among young people about this issue".*

EFFECTIVENESS

Several people operating in the detention centres get frustrated, because they wanted to get results. "*However, you have to accept powerlessness: you have no power. You can't change anything. You can only be with the person, accompany them. And then, something can happen. But it's not the result of your effort—it is God's work".*

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

After a few weeks, when they realize you come every week, the door to a relationship opens. *"And then something can happen: they don't talk to you like a civil servant, they talk to you like someone who returns, who is there for them. You become part of their story, even if it's only for a short time".*

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

Father P.P.L. was sent by the provincial superior of the Jesuits: *"I am part of the Jesuit Refugee Service, and we are a community with lay people and Jesuits. We support each other. Each one has their mission, but we share the same spirituality".* They collaborate actively with lawyers who defend the rights of migrants, or with the associations that work for alternatives to detention. *"This network of people is indispensable".*

REPLICABILITY

The model is replicable, even though the work is demanding. Father P.P.L. visits the all the centres once a month, accompanied by a sister: *"it is essential not to be alone. We share the experience, we pray together. This form of accompaniment does not rely on large structures, but it does require a great deal of spiritual presence. If someone wants to replicate this model, the first thing they must understand is that it's not about helping from the outside, but about being within, with them, even if we can't change anything."*

SYNODALITY: A PEOPLE WALKS TOGETHER, FATHER RUBIO PASTORAL UNIT, ARCHDIOCESE OF MADRID, SPAIN

Country and Place: Spain, Madrid

Initiative: Synodal and spiritual accompaniment in a Jesuit pastoral unit

Beneficiaries: Migrants, particularly women, families, children, youth, and vulnerable individuals

Theme: Spiritual accompaniment, synodality, integration, Ignatian spirituality

Project Duration: Since 1940s to date; with present structure, since 2016

Funding Source: Parish funds, designated donations for social programs, and volunteer contributions

Website: https://upastoralrubio.org/

Catholic Organization: Jesuit-led pastoral unit, part of the Archdiocese of Madrid

The Father Rubio Pastoral Unit was established in 2018 through the union of the parishes of San Francisco Javier and San Ignacio—neighbouring parishes with distinct histories: one under diocesan leadership and the other guided by the Jesuits. This fusion represents a deeply rooted experience of spiritual accompaniment and integration. Over the years, the number of migrants, especially from Latin America, has grown and become a vital pillar at every level of the community. They not only actively participate; they bring life, faith, and spiritual strength. Without them, *"the pastoral unit would not be even half of what it is,"* says Father P.V., SJ, pastor and coordinator of the Rubio Pastoral Unit in the La Ventilla neighbourhood of Madrid[26].

26 All passages in quotation marks and italics correspond to the interview with Father P.V. SJ, parish priest and coordinator of the Padre Rubio Pastoral Unit in the La Ventilla neighborhood (Madrid).

The Pastoral Unit has made spiritual accompaniment its heart and driving force, showing that *"it is possible to walk together—migrants and Spaniards, men and women, lay and religious—in a synodal Church that is alive and rooted in the neighbourhood."* Ignatian spirituality, far from remaining theoretical, is lived out with depth, openness, and daily commitment. *"Everyone is increasingly aware that the Church is a people on a journey, where lay people are at the center of parish life. Fundamentally, it is a people of the baptized, and they are the heart, the nucleus, the center, the core of the community. Empathy and social sensitivity have been key to creating spaces of welcome and participation, fostering an environment where diversity is a shared value."*

It is grounded in a God who dwells and works in all creatures and in everything that happens to us. *"It moves us to live from a deep sense of gratitude for all the gifts received, makes us aware of our weaknesses, and provides keys that transform our relationships, turning us into people who focus their lives on others".*

Since the 1940s, the Jesuit community has accompanied a social reality shaped by migration. Initially, in the 1960s, it was Spaniards from impoverished regions who settled in Madrid. Today, the migrant community—especially from Latin America—has revitalized parish life, actively participating in catechesis, liturgy, the parish council, and social support programs. Their involvement has enabled the parish to reach two thousand people, with a central core of 150 active members. In the last fifteen years, the number of children and youth has grown significantly, reflecting the community's dynamism.

Spiritual accompaniment in this community is not limited to liturgical moments or occasional practices. It permeates the entire life of the community through various dimensions. *Spiritual Exercises in daily life* are offered annually as a form of personalized accompaniment: migrant participants integrate their faith journey within the Ignatian charism. *Personal accompaniment and confession:* many migrants, particularly in times of crisis, seek out the priest; spiritual accompaniment takes place through listening and pastoral guidance. *Spiritual and leadership training:* migrant leaders are invited to attend courses on discernment, leadership, and synodality, fostering mature, free, and responsible faith. *Participatory liturgies:* Sunday Eucharists include "open microphones", where migrants often share testimonies of faith rooted in suffering, hope, and rebuilding their lives; these experiences inspire the entire

community. *Feminine spiritual presence:* many migrant women—single, with children, or in harsh situation—support not only their families but also the wider community. *"They are the most prophetic witnesses among us,"* says Father Pablo. Their witness revitalizes the experience of Advent and the very sense of Christian hope. *Hospitality as a spiritual space:* welcoming unhoused or undocumented persons—often migrants—becomes a space of spiritual encounter; volunteers are transformed by the faith, gratitude, and strength of those they accompany. *Interfaith relationships lived from faith:* the community shares housing with young Muslims; without proselytism, through mutual respect and faith, they foster shared life and mutual accompaniment.

EVALUATION OF THE GOOD PRACTICE ACCORDING TO THE MAIN PARAMETERS

POSITIVE IMPACT

The participation of migrant people is key to the functioning of the community. They play leading roles in catechesis, visiting the elderly, social outreach, and the parish council. Their testimonies of life and faith have had a profound spiritual impact on the local community, challenging prejudices, awakening empathy, and strengthening fraternity between migrants and Spaniards. They bring liturgical vitality and an embodied experience of Christian hope. The Sunday liturgies, with open microphones, reveal a shared faith that revitalizes the entire community.

SUSTAINABILITY

The parish has developed strategies to spiritually accompany children and adolescents, ensuring the project's continuity into future generations. Ignatian training in spiritual discernment and leadership is promoted. The community has consolidated mechanisms of co-responsibility that allow activities to be sustained through the economic and personal commitment of its members. The synodal and horizontal model supports long-term sustainability: *"it is the DNA of this community".*

INNOVATION

The parish has reinforced the role of laypeople, integrating synodality as a structural axis. It offers a spirituality lived in everyday life: personalized spiritual exercises, online spiritual education, and individual pastoral accompaniment. The open microphone during Sunday liturgy and shared educational spaces have renewed how faith is expressed. The participation of migrant women, prophetic witnesses of an incarnated faith, has brought new voices and perspectives to the community's spirituality.

EFFECTIVENESS

Spiritual and communal growth is evident. Liturgical celebrations—including devotions to the Virgin of Quinche (Ecuador) and the Virgin of Caacupé (Paraguay)—have strengthened identity and a sense of belonging. Migrants are both recipients and protagonists of spiritual accompaniment, and their presence has reactivated pastoral vitality, especially among children and youth. The shared faith experience transforms, evangelizes, and strengthens bonds.

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

The Pastoral Unit is organized through participatory structures that promote co-responsibility. Laypeople have voice and vote in the pastoral and economic councils. Mechanisms of transparency are practiced, such as public accountability. Migrants not only participate—they take on liturgical, educational, and social responsibilities. Young precentors and catechists with migratory background demand to be heard *"because this is also their parish".* Their involvement is a sign of deep and conscious belonging.

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

Alliances have been developed with other parishes in the archpriest district, sharing retreats, camps, education, and Caritas services. Through foundations like Pueblos Unidos, interreligious and hospitality spaces with Muslim youth have been created. From a respectful and non-proselytizing experience of faith, mutual accompaniment is generated. The Pastoral Unit also collaborates with psychologists and

actives listening spaces to address spiritual and emotional needs during times of special vulnerability.

REPLICABILITY

This experience shows that it is possible to create lively, diverse, and spiritually integrated ecclesial communities through personal accompaniment, education, co-responsibility, and active participation. The model is transferable to other contexts with significant migrant presence, provided that listening, horizontality, and a spirituality rooted in real community life are promoted. Synodality, when lived authentically, is the strongest guarantee of replicability.

VI. YOUTH, MIGRATION AND MEANING

A LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS: THE STREET UNIT, SISTERS OF CHARITY OF THE HOLY CROSS, CZECH REPUBLIC

Country and Place: Czech Republic, Praga

Initiative: The Street Unit

Beneficiaries: 50 women per month

Theme: Human Trafficking

Project Duration: Since 2007 to date

Funding Source: Congregation and Donations

Website: www.scala-mss.net/

Catholic Organization: Sisters of Charity of the Holy Cross

The Motherhouse of the Sisters of Charity of the Holy Cross is in Switzerland, and they are present in several countries on five continents; they are about two thousand. Their charism lies on the belief that *"God's desire is to meet the needs of our time".* They have recognized the tragedy of trafficking in women, a phenomenon present in all countries, whether of origin, transit, or destination, and have felt God's call to act.

"We have created an international group to raise awareness among the sisters about this problem. For eighteen years, the sisters have organized street units in several countries; in other countries, they have family homes". They also carry out prevention programs in schools: these are profound and ongoing awareness-raising actions. While carrying out their service discreetly and respectfully with each person's freedom, the nuns transmit, with their very presence, the Gospel values of wel-

come, compassion, and respect for human dignity. This silent spiritual accompaniment is the invisible core of their action.

In the Czech Republic, they created the Street Unit: *"we work with women on the streets, in brothels and nightclubs. We visit them, despite the opposition of the club owners; they leave us outside, in the cold for an hour or more, because - they say - we ruin the business. However, after an hour with no customers coming in because of our presence at the club entrance, they let us in. We then go in and sprinkle holy water everywhere"*, says Sister K.[27] The Street Units visits women wherever they are, talks about their situation, and guides them toward ways to help. *"I work in team"* – Sister K. continues – *"there are three of us: me, a nurse and a driver, who stays in the car. We travel every two weeks to different cities in the Czech Republic. It's a professional job; it's not a spiritual mission, it's not about praying or faith, because the nurse and the driver are neither believers nor practicing. We go to night clubs, brothels and discos, we also go on the street, and we do tests for diseases, like HIV and hepatitis. And while we wait for the results, we talk with these girls".* Each girl is given a small scroll with the word of God, or a holy card, or a bag with a religious symbol - all of which are important. Each gift also includes a phone number. It's a sign of hope. When situations of particular vulnerability arise—violence, serious illness, pregnancy - the sisters intervene specifically, accompanying them to health, legal, or shelter, ensuring they receive the support they need to find dignity and hope.

The women feel the need to confide in one another, to share what has happened in their lives. Some are single mothers, with children and many debts; others are *"foreign victims of trafficking, they know they can call the number we left for them; they know they'll find support there; then we pray with them, for them"*. The sisters seek solutions through social assistance. Each one is provided with a helpline number, available in several languages. These women encounter someone who does not judge them, who understands that no woman chooses prostitution voluntarily, but that something painful has happened. *"We meet women from various countries: Romania, Bulgaria, Nigeria, Slovakia, Ukraine, some women also from Latin America; the number of foreign women varies periodically. Even though we can't do much for them, they receive our support; they receive the phone number. We don't know if they will use it, but they know that we're not just going to pray with them*

27 The passages in quotation marks and in italics are excerpts from the interview.

or talk, but that we also know about their trafficking situation and that there is some way to help them." The sisters pray with them, talk, and encourage them to call. *"Those who are - or could be - victims of trafficking, we don't know for sure, don't say anything. But they know we know; it distresses them to say it".* It's not known whether they will call. No one will know: everything is kept secret. The sisters wear the religious habit, which inspires confidence. In one of the most atheistic countries in Europe, this habit is still respected, as for seventy years they have worked in hospitals doing good. They are recognized and esteemed in Czech Republic.

EVALUATION OF THE GOOD PRACTICE ACCORDING TO THE MAIN PARAMETERS

POSITIVE IMPACT

The impact is certainly positive, because *"they tell me: 'You're a mobile church'. They don't know how to go to church, but the church reaches them. I'm very surprised by the relation with these women".* They know there's someone who doesn't judge them, who understands them. And they know that they can receive even more help if they decide to call the number, we leave for them. In the discos and in the night club, "*I sprinkle holy water as a spiritual gesture of protection or deliverances*". Meanwhile, prevention work continues in schools: *"Children must understand that going to nightclubs won't bring them happiness. If there are fewer customers, there will be fewer women who will have to resort to prostitution".*

SUSTAINABILITY

"As all the Street Unit members are volunteers, we require minimal financial support". They rely on small donations, money or even symbolic items like medals. There's always someone who gives donations for this project. *"As we only travel by car, our expenses are minimal. Thank God, so far there's money. When we're gone, others will follow. That's right. When society is in pain, God awakens the desire to respond in someone's heart".*

INNOVATION

The small scrolls containing spiritual messages are a simple yet profound innovation. *"It's an innovation that we pray with the girls before the service, but also afterward; it's a way of cleaning our weapons, because the sabre is long and needs to be cleaned. We are just tools; we don't do the work. It is thanks to God that we can enter the clubs and that the girls tell us their stories, pray with us, listen to us and then they are happy"*.

EFFECTIVENESS

The women notice the absence of the Street Unit if they don't come: *"you haven't been here for a month"*. The sisters become friends with them. These women are reserved at first, but they are happy to see them later. The sisters ask if they're looking for a solution. Many say yes, they're looking for work, and tell the sisters: *"I won't be here next month"*.

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

"*I don't know how much we have changed, but I know we have changed*", says Sister Klara, her voice betraying a hint of emotion after fifteen years of working with exploited women. For her, the participatory approach is not just a method, but a way of life. "*It's not just about meeting people in extreme situations; it's about listening to them and walking alongside them. Sometimes they just need someone to see them and believe in them*". However, the impact is not always visible. "*Spiritual transformation cannot be measured. It is something that can be seen day by day*". This also affects team members: *"The change affects not only the people whose lives we help to change, but us too. The whole team is transformed by sharing this experience*".

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

This initiative is carried out in collaboration with the La Strada organization and, in some ways, with the Diocese and other Congregations. It is a working group that involves nuns from other congregations on visits to nightclubs with the Street Unit. "*We collaborate on prevention programs in schools along with Caritas, youth groups, various congregations, parishes and schools*". The activity is part of the RENATE network.

"*The RENATE network is a true support; being part of the network helps a lot*". Networking is essential: the members of the RENATE network provide continuous training. *"Thanks to them, we learn how to handle difficult situations. They also cooperate with Gegen Frauenhandel* (www.gegen-frauenhandel.de)*, a German religious network that works closely with the police. The police do not accompany us but follow us from afar to solve problems and help girls"*.

REPLICABILITY

The action is replicable, "*if God's call is heeded*". *"Many Units could emerge in different cities, especially in border areas where almost no one goes to see these women. It would be very important and beautiful. The nuns pray for this to happen and are available to teach how to do it"*.

Lord Jesus,
Here I am. I come to you just as I am. I believe you are looking at me with great love. Recreate me. Touch and heal all that is wounded and hurting inside me. You know it all, Lord.
I thank you for having awakened me today. Thank you for the gift of this day. I entrust it to you, along with my heart, body, mind and soul.
Grant that I may spend it as a woman of forgiveness and goodness who knows that her dignity is found in you. Make me into a woman after your own heart.
I believe that no matter what happens, you will be with me. I believe you will never leave me.
Your loving gaze follows me every step of the way.
Lord, I thank you. I entrust my whole being to you.
Mary, woman gentle and pure, pray for us. Amen

O Lord, hide me in the shadow of your wings.
Ps. 17:8
kteří se ho bojí.
srov. Ž 103,17

DICASTERY FOR PROMOTING
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